

VAN BUREN COUNTY
COORDINATED TRANSIT PLAN

Prepared by the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission
August 2007

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF TABLES	3
TABLE OF MAPS.....	4
TABLE OF FIGURES	5
I. INTRODUCTION	6
FTA Funding Sources Requiring a Coordinated Plan	6
II. PLAN DEVELOPMENT AND STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION	9
Methodology	9
Stakeholder Meeting Summaries	10
Plan Adoption	12
III. AVAILABLE SERVICES	13
Van Buren Public Transit.....	13
Other Transportation Modes	17
IV. TRANSPORTATION NEEDS.....	20
VBPT Ridership.....	20
Transportation Disadvantaged Populations	21
Trip Types.....	38
Conclusion	50
V. STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS SERVICE GAPS	51
Strategies.....	51
VI. IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS	66
Action Plan.....	66
APPENDIX.....	83

TABLE OF TABLES

Table 1	12
Table 2	14
Table 3	14
Table 4	14
Table 5	15
Table 6	17
Table 7	18
Table 8	19
Table 9	20
Table 10	20
Table 11	21
Table 12	23
Table 13	29
Table 14	31
Table 15	36
Table 16	45
Table 17	49

TABLE OF MAPS

Map 1	16
Map 2	24
Map 3	26
Map 4	28
Map 5	30
Map 6	32
Map 7	34
Map 8	35
Map 9	40
Map 10	41
Map 11	42
Map 12	43
Map 13	47

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1 37

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Van Buren County (VBC) Coordinated Transit Plan is to fulfill a new requirement initiated by recent federal legislation, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: a Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) of 2005. SAFETEA-LU requires the development of a public transit and human service transportation plan in order for public transit agencies to be eligible for certain grants from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) by fiscal year 2007. The coordinated plan requirement builds on the “United We Ride” initiative as well as efforts of the Federal Inter-Agency Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility established under Executive Order 13330.

Per federal requirements, the VBC Coordinated Transit Plan includes the following:

- An assessment of available services in VBC;
- An assessment of the transportation needs for individuals with disabilities, low-income persons and the elderly;
- Strategies and activities to address gaps and achieve efficiencies in service delivery; and
- Relative priorities for implementation.

FTA Funding Sources Requiring a Coordinated Plan

There are three FTA funding programs that require the development of a coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan. These programs include Section 5310, the Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities Program; Section 5316, the Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) Program; and Section 5317, the New Freedom Program. These three (3) programs are defined below.

Section 5310

The Section 5310 Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities Program provides grant funding, usually for capital projects, for private nonprofit groups to meet the transportation needs of elderly and disabled persons when other transportation services (public and private) are unavailable, insufficient, or inappropriate to meeting those needs.

Eligible capital expenses may include:

- Buses/vans and related vehicle equipment;
- Vehicle shelters;
- Vehicle rehabilitation;
- Preventive maintenance and extended warranties (within specified limits);
- Computer hardware and software;
- Initial component installation costs;
- Vehicle procurement, testing, inspection and acceptance costs;
- Lease of equipment when lease is more cost effective than purchase;
- Acquisition of transportation services under contract, lease or other arrangement;
- The introduction of new technology and transit related intelligent transportation systems (ITS); and

- New mobility management and coordination programs among public and/or human service transportation providers.

Funds are distributed to each State based on its share of elderly and disabled population; States apply for grant funds on behalf of local private not-for-profit agencies and certain eligible public bodies. Grants are distributed on an annual basis, with an 80 percent federal and 20 percent local match. Eligible capital equipment includes cars, vans, modified vans, buses, and radio communication systems.

Section 5316

The Section 5316 JARC Program is a grant program for local government authorities/agencies and non-profit agencies, to develop transportation services to transport welfare recipients and low-income persons to and from jobs (Job Access); and to transport residents of urban centers, rural, and suburban areas to suburban employment opportunities (Reverse Commute). Job Access grants can be used for capital and operating costs of equipment, facilities, and capital maintenance related to providing access to jobs. Costs to promote transit for workers with nontraditional work schedules, the use of transit vouchers, and the use of employer-provided transportation are also covered. Reverse Commute grants can be used for operating, capital and other costs associated with providing reverse commute service by bus, train, carpool, vans or other transportation services.

Eligible activities for JARC funding include:

- Late-night and weekend service;
- Guaranteed ride home service;
- Shuttle service;
- Expanded fixed-route public transit routes;
- Demand-responsive service;
- Ridesharing and carpooling activities;
- Transit related aspects of bicycling;
- Local car loan programs that assist individuals in purchasing and maintaining vehicles for shared rides;
- Marketing promotions for JARC activities;
- Supporting the administration and expenses related to voucher programs;
- Using geographic information system (GIS) tools and/or implementing intelligent transportation systems (ITS);
- Integrating automated regional public transit and human service transportation information, scheduling and dispatch functions;
- Deploying vehicle position-monitoring systems; and
- Establishing regional mobility managers or transportation brokerage activities.

Federal funds for the program are allocated by formula to States for areas with populations below 200,000 persons, and to designated recipients for areas with populations of 200,000 persons and above. The formula is based on the number of eligible low-income and welfare recipients in urbanized and rural areas. 60 percent of these Federal funds will go to areas with population over 200,000. The federal/local share of this program is 80/20 for capital expenses, 50/50 for operating expenses, and 100% federal of up to 10% of the apportionment

available for planning, administration, and technical assistance. Matching funds include any non-U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) Federal funds, if transportation is a permitted use.

Section 5317

The Section 5317 New Freedom Program is a new formula grant program for public or alternative transportation services and facility improvements to address the needs of persons with disabilities that go beyond those required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Funds will cover capital and operating costs to provide that new service.

Examples of eligible activities for New Freedom funding include:

- Enhancing public transportation beyond the minimum requirements of the ADA;
- Providing “feeder” services;
- Making accessibility improvements to transit and intermodal stations;
- Providing travel training; purchasing vehicles to support new accessible taxi, ridesharing, and/or vanpooling programs;
- Covering the administration and expenses of new voucher programs for transportation services offered by human service agencies;
- Supporting new volunteer driver and aide programs; and
- Supporting new mobility management and coordination programs among public and/or human service transportation providers.

Federal funds for the program are allocated by formula to States for areas with populations below 200,000 persons, and to designated recipients for areas with populations of 200,000 persons and above. The formula is based on the number of individuals with disabilities in urbanized and rural areas. 60 percent of these Federal funds will go to areas with population over 200,000. The federal / local share of this program is 80/20 for capital expenses, 50/50 for operating expenses, and 100% federal of up to 10% of the apportionment available for planning, administration, and technical assistance. Matching funds include any non-U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) Federal funds, if transportation is a permitted use.

II. PLAN DEVELOPMENT AND STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

The VBC Coordinated Transit Plan has been derived from and is designed to compliment the Van Buren Public Transit (VBPT) Study and Implementation Handbook. In addition, the VBC Coordinated Transit Plan is based on continuing meetings of stakeholders over the past couple years to investigate technology options for VBPT to increase coordination efforts between VBPT and human service agencies.

The Van Buren Public Transit Study was authorized by the VBC Board of Commissioners in 2005 to assess the feasibility of continuing to operate VBPT in the future. The Board of Commissioners requested that the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC, formerly known as the Southwestern Michigan Commission, or SWMC) conduct the study, which would examine the current system and develop goals and objectives with an action plan for a more sustainable and efficient system in the future.

Both the Study and the Implementation Handbook are available online at <http://www.swmpc.org/vbtransit.asp> or by contacting the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission at:

185 East Main Street, Suite 701
Benton Harbor, MI 49022
269.925.1137

Methodology

The methodology used to develop the Transit Study included all of the required elements of a coordinated transit plan: public outreach and stakeholder input, an assessment of available needs and services, strategies to improve service, and recommendations for implementation. For this reason, the Transit Study has been reconfigured into the VBC Coordinated Transit Plan.

To study and evaluate all aspects of the transit system, several different approaches were utilized, including:

- On-site observations were made at VBPT by SWMPC staff. These observations of the facilities and dispatch procedures provided a better understanding of the internal daily operations at VBPT.
- Interviews were conducted with VBPT staff and staff from key agencies that provide or schedule transportation for their clients. An interview was also conducted with Transportation Management Incorporated, (TMI) which, at the time, provided a transportation brokering service for VBPT and Work First/Welfare to Work clients using JARC funds. The interviews helped to gain a better understanding of the current transit environment in VBC and of the current and future transit needs in the County.
- Steering Committee meetings were held with members who were selected to represent a variety of stakeholders such as human service agency representatives,

transit board members, municipal and business leaders, and the general public. See the Appendix for a list of members. The Steering Committee's role was to assist the SWMPC in creating a new vision for VBPT and to establish the future direction for public transit in VBC.

- The SWMPC and the Steering Committee members participated in ten meetings between April and September 2005. Information and ideas generated at these meetings are incorporated throughout the study and became the foundation for the new vision, which includes a mission statement, goals, objectives, and an action plan.
- Surveys were conducted including an Agency Transportation Survey, which was sent to twenty-eight social service agencies with clients in VBC. The results of that survey are utilized throughout the report; the complete survey results can be found in the VBPT Study. Information collected from the surveys was used by the SWMPC to assess the agencies' clients' needs for transportation and to identify potential coordination opportunities between the agencies and VBPT.
- Analysis of Demographic Reports from the U.S. Census Bureau and the State of Michigan were consulted to determine the current needs and potential future needs of a public transit system in VBC.
- Analysis of operating system reports and data such as VBPT's financial records and performance data were conducted to gain an understanding of the current system. The information was utilized to determine VBPT's current service levels, efficiencies and present funding sources. This information was then used to make recommendations for the future of VBPT in terms of operational efficiency and fiscal stability.
- Comparisons of other public transit systems serving counties with similar populations and demographics were done. Many other public transit systems are facing similar issues as VBPT. There are a few systems that have found innovative solutions that can be utilized in VBC. Similar systems can also be used to provide benchmarks for VBPT.

Stakeholder Meeting Summaries

A combination of methods was utilized to create a new vision for VBPT including an agency transportation survey and several workshops with the steering committee. These exercises with the steering committee involved stakeholders to identify the future needs and direction for VBPT. A summary of the agency survey and a few of the stakeholder meetings designed to get input are described below.

Agency Transportation Survey Summary

Surveys were sent to 28 agencies in May 2005 requesting information regarding client transportation needs and current usage. Thirteen agencies responded, of which six identified their organizations as private, non-profit; two as public; one as government; and four did not

specify. The results of the survey have been incorporated into various sections of the report and the complete survey results can be found in the VBPT Study.

SWOT Workshop Summary

At the June 3, 2005 Steering Committee Workshop, members worked through an exercise designed to identify major strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) to VBPT. There were many ideas submitted for each section and at the conclusion of the meeting the priorities were identified as follows:

Strengths include:

- Potentially broad customer base
- Committed board (willing to make changes)
- Dedicated staff that is well trained
- Equipment and buses in great condition
- Friendly drivers who care about their riders

Weaknesses include:

- No strategic plan or vision
- Lack of flexibility in hours and locations
- No county millage
- Little if any public relations or self promotion
- No defined outreach program
- Few connections with other providers
- An overall image of being a “handicap” bus service
- Lack of communication to users about schedule and service
- Lack of leadership or authority to make decisions
- Lack of secure local funding from cities, townships and villages
- Lack of coordinated transit system

Opportunities include:

- Potential to capture untapped ridership
- Increased efficiency to deal with cutbacks
- Improve image
- Develop a plan
- Identify common locations and schedules
- Secure stable local funding
- Distribute information to untapped ridership opportunities (i.e., people who have lost driver’s license)
- Improvement in transit advertising in general

Threats include:

- Funding that is not adequate or sustainable
- Resistance to change
- Decreased funding and decreased ridership from Mental Health clients
- Competition with private providers
- Lack of success in acquiring funding

Framework for Action Workshop Summary

At the June 10, 2005 steering committee workshop, SWMPC led the group through a self-assessment exercise developed by United We Ride called *Framework for Action*. The exercise assessed five core elements that make up a fully coordinated transportation system for a community. Under each element, participants were asked diagnostic questions, and using a set of "decision helpers," were asked to assess how much effort is needed to become more fully coordinated (*needs to begin, needs significant action, needs action, and is done well*). The results are summarized in Table 1 below and comments recorded during the session are included.

Table 1

Framework for Action Workshop Summary		
Core Element of Coordination	Assigned Level of Effort Needed	Comments
Making things happen by working together	<i>needs to begin and needs significant action</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Need for a better definition of the governing body ▪ Need to demonstrate efficiencies ▪ Lack of inter-governmental and agency communication ▪ Lack of vision
Taking stock of community needs and moving forward	<i>needs significant action</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No consistent plan or reaction to crisis ▪ Lack of awareness ▪ Need for informal routes ▪ Not much use of technology ▪ Too many assumptions – no hard data or statistics on riders
Putting customers first	<i>needs to begin and needs action</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of public education/marketing ▪ Need to get feedback from users ▪ More flexibility for customers
Adapting funding for greater mobility	<i>needs to begin, needs significant action and is done well</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Need for good internal tracking ▪ Need for automated billing ▪ Lack of awareness of the transit system's financial health ▪ Lack of data sharing across programs
Moving people efficiently	<i>needs to begin and needs action</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dispatch system and facility are adequate and in a good location ▪ Need for more flexibility in services, hard data, and coordination between support services

Plan Adoption

The 2005 Van Buren Public Transit Study was widely distributed and reviewed by many stakeholders. Although the study was not officially adopted, it is serving as a guide for future efforts by VBPT and the participating stakeholders. The VBC Coordinated Transit Plan was also distributed and reviewed by stakeholders. Comments received by the stakeholders were incorporated and the plan was finalized and presented to the VBPT board of directors for adoption.

III. AVAILABLE SERVICES

In Van Buren County, there are public, private non-profit and private for-profit transportation options available.

Van Buren Public Transit

VBC is the 45th largest county (of 83) in Michigan with a total area of 1,090 square miles – 611 square miles of land and 479 square miles of water. VBPT serves all of the municipalities in VBC with a total population of 76,263.¹ Following is a list of municipalities, and corresponding populations, in VBC.

Cities	Villages	Townships	
Bangor – 1,933	Bloomingtondale – 528	Almena – 4,226	Hamilton – 1,797
Gobles – 815	Breedsville – 235	Antwerp – 10,813	Hartford – 3,159
Hartford – 2,476	Decatur – 1,838	Arlington – 2,075	Lawrence – 3,341
South Haven – 5,021	Lawrence – 1,059	Bangor – 2,121	Keeler – 2,601
	Lawton – 1,859	Bloomingtondale – 3,364	Paw Paw – 7,091
	Mattawan – 2,536	Columbia – 2,714	Pine Grove – 2,773
	Paw Paw – 3,363	Covert – 3,141	Porter – 2,406
		Decatur – 3,916	South Haven – 4,046
		Geneva – 3,975	Waverly – 2,467

As of September 2005, VBPT had a total fleet of 14 vehicles with 12 buses and two vans. All of the buses are lift equipped, but the two vans are not. All buses are smoke free and no eating or drinking is allowed. All vehicles are stored inside when not in use.

VBPT provides separate Dial-A-Ride services for South Haven and Paw Paw. VBPT also offers a countywide service with a 24-hour reservation. VBPT can be contracted to provide special transportation services, at an hourly rate, to groups and organizations. (An example is providing bus transportation for the South Haven Regional Airport's Fly-In during Blueberry Festival in August 2005.) VBPT also provides contracted services to several human service agencies within the county.

Dial-A-Ride provides about 18,000 rides that are curb-to-curb service within the Paw Paw and South Haven areas. Following is a description of the two Dial-A-Ride services. In 2004, **South Haven Dial-A-Ride** represented 34 percent of the total VBPT ridership² and serves all of South Haven City, South Haven Township, the west part of Geneva Township (to 68th Street) and North Shore Drive to Blue Star Highway. This area is divided into two zones, each with a different fee schedule (see Table 2 below). Travel within Zone 1 does not require a 24-hour reservation, but travel within Zone 2 or between Zone 1 and 2 requires a 24-hour reservation. South Haven Dial-A-Ride service operates Monday – Friday, with two buses running from 7:00 am until 4:00 pm and one bus running from 9:00 a.m. until 1:30 p.m. The average fare for the South Haven Dial-A-Ride is \$4.13. Fares are for one-way trips.

¹ U.S. Census 2000

² VBPT Records

Table 2

South Haven Dial-A-Ride Service		
Zone	Area Covered	Fares* (after August 2005)
1	North Shore Drive to Baseline Road to 71½ Street to 8 th Avenue to 72 nd Street to 12 th Avenue to M-140 to 14 th Avenue.	Travel within Zone 1 is \$5.00 full fare and \$2.50 for seniors, disabled, students, and children age 2-12 years.
2	Baseline Road East from 71½ Street to 68 th Street to 24 th Avenue	Travel within Zone 2 is \$6.00 full fare and \$3.00 for seniors, disabled, students, and children age 2-12 years.

* Infants are free with paid adult fare. Student rate is to and from school within VBC.

Paw Paw Dial-A-Ride service requires a 24-hour reservation and in 2004 represented 5.7 percent of the total VBPT ridership.³ Paw Paw Dial-A-Ride service operates Monday - Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. The average fare for Paw Paw Dial-A-Ride is \$3.75.

Table 3

Paw Paw Dial-A-Ride Service	
Area Covered	Fares (after August 2005)
From Paw Paw, north to 44 th Avenue, south to I-94, east to CR 653, and west to 41 st Street	Full travel fare is \$5.00 . Seniors, disabled, students, and children age 2-12 years pay \$2.50* .

*Infants are free with paid adult fare. Student rate is to and from school within VBC.

Countywide service represented 5 percent of total VBPT annual ridership in 2004.⁴ This service requires a 24-hour reservation for travel within the boundaries of VBC and operates Monday through Friday from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The dispatch office is closed from 10:30 to 11:00 a.m. and from 4:00-4:15 p.m. for lunch breaks. VBPT will also transport customers outside of VBC for medical purposes if a vehicle is available. The county is divided into four zones to determine passenger fares.

Table 4

Countywide Service – Schedule and Zones	
Pickups are between 8:45 a.m. – 9:45 a.m. Returns are from 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.	
Zone A	Townships of South Haven, Geneva, Columbia, Covert, Bangor, Arlington, and the cities of South Haven and Bangor.
Zone B	Townships of Bloomingdale, Pine Grove, Almena, Waverly and the Village of Bloomingdale and the City of Gobles.
Zone C	Townships of Hartford, Lawrence, Keeler, Hamilton, and the City of Hartford and the Village of Lawrence.
Zone D	Townships of Paw Paw, Antwerp, Decatur, Porter, and the villages of Paw Paw, Lawton, Mattawan, and Decatur.

³ VBPT Records

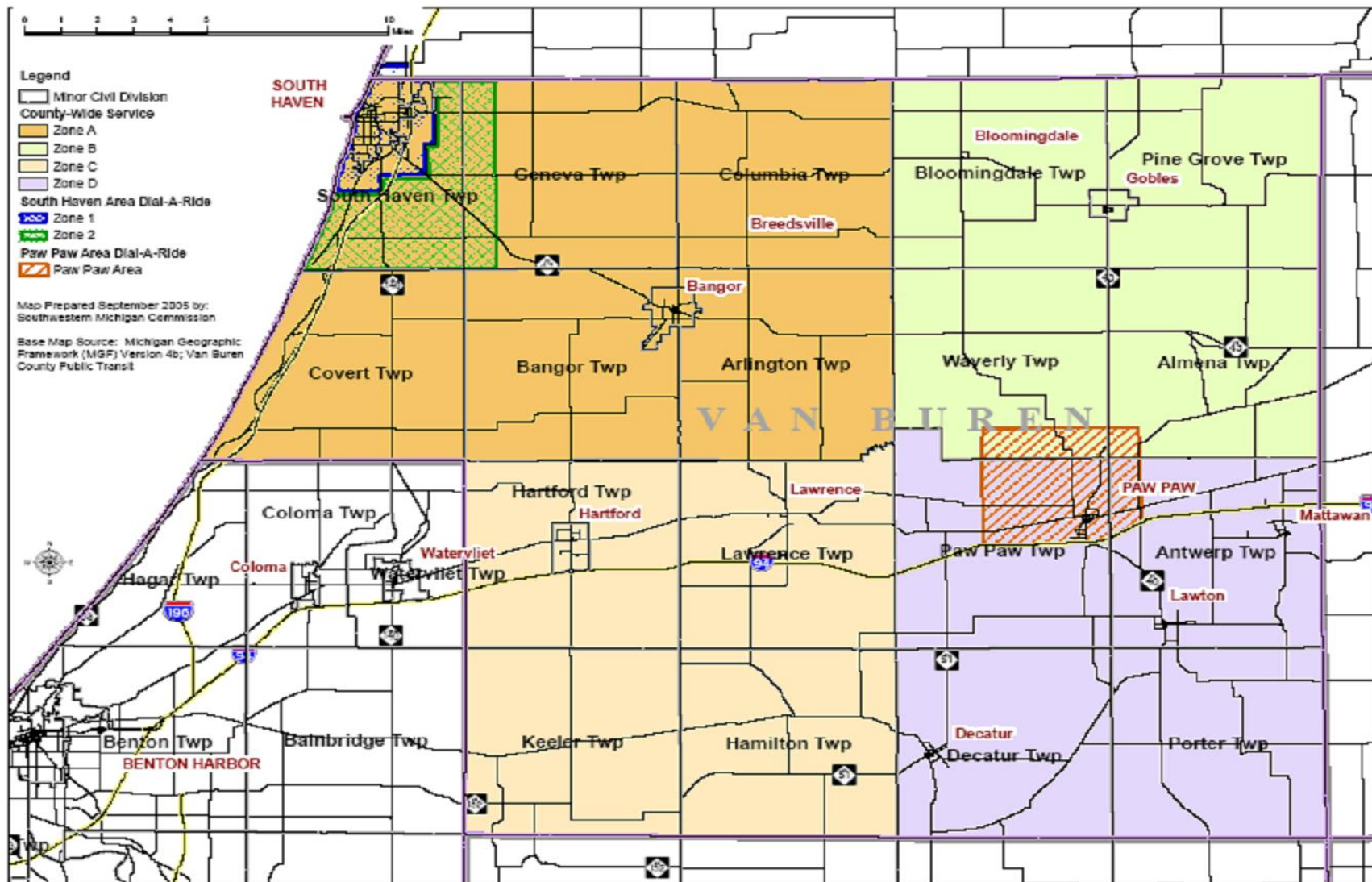
⁴ VBPT Records

The fee schedule for countywide service is shown below. This fee schedule became effective September 1, 2005. The average fare traveling within the county is \$5.62. Fares are for one-way trips unless otherwise specified.

Table 5

Countywide Service – Fares*	
For travel within a zone:	Fare
Full fare	\$7.00
½ fare for seniors, disabled, children, students	\$3.50
For travel from zone to zone:	Fare
Full fare	\$8.00
½ fare for seniors, disabled, children, students	\$4.00
For travel outside of county:	Fare
Round trip	\$20.00
One-way trip	\$10.00

** Infants are free with paid adult fare. Student rate is to and from school within VBC.*

Map 1 Service area

Other Transportation Modes

In addition to the public transit service provided by VBPT, the overall transportation system of VBC includes the modes listed below. These modes may be potential links or alternative options to the services provided by VBPT.

Private Services

There are many private transportation providers serving VBC. The following table lists several of these providers. These private providers are often utilized by the human service agencies because of the flexibility of their services in terms of hours of operation and ease of transporting across county lines. Some of the private providers can be seen as competitors to VBPT, but VBPT will never be able to accommodate all transportation needs within the county. Instead VBPT should view the private providers as another option and find ways to coordinate transportation services with the private sector to meet customers' needs.

Table 6

Private Transportation Providers		
Transportation Provider	Type of Service	General Area Served
Van Buren Transportation Services	Taxi	Berrien Cass Van Buren Kalamazoo
Mr. G's Express	Wheelchair-lift vehicles, cars, mini- and full-size vans. 24 hours/7 days	Berrien Cass Van Buren
Advance Cab	Taxi - Demand-responsive	
Blue Stone Transportation	Taxi	Berrien Cass Van Buren Kalamazoo
Van Buren Care-A-Van	Will-call operation 5:30 a.m. - 11:00 p.m.	
Region Care-A-Van	Door to door per client	
Bumble Bee Cabs	Taxi – 24 hour operation	Berrien Cass Van Buren Kalamazoo
SMACAS	Non-emergency medical transportation	
Red's Taxi	Demand-responsive	
VBEMS	Ambulance service	
Wil Care Nursing	Door to door per client	

Other Public Transit Systems

The counties listed in *Table 7* are adjacent to VBC and have public transit systems available. These systems are potential partners and/or resources to connect VBC with neighboring counties and to enable a more regional scope of service.

Table 7

Adjacent County Public Transit Systems		
Allegan County	Type of Service	Area Served
Allegan County Transportation	Reservation/demand response bus system	Allegan, Otsego, Plainwell, Pullman, Fennville, Hamilton, Holland, Wayland, Dorr, Martin, and Shelbyville
Macatawa Area Express (MAX) Transit	Fixed routes Mondays - Saturdays	Macatawa, Greater Holland Area
Saugatuck Township Interurban Transit	Door-to-door demand-response service – operates daily in summer	City of Saugatuck and Saugatuck Township (including the Village of Douglas)
Berrien County	Type of Service	Area Served
Berrien Bus	Non-urban system includes both semi-fixed route service and demand-response service.	Berrien County
Twin Cities Area Transportation Authority (TCATA)	Demand response service, and standing order requests for fixed daily rides	City of Benton Harbor, Benton Charter Township, the City of St. Joseph, and part of St. Joseph Charter Township.
Niles Dial-A-Ride	Demand-response service	Niles and regular shuttle service to the City of Buchanan
Buchanan Dial-A-Ride	Demand-responsive	City of Buchanan
Cass County	Type of Service	Area Served
Cass County Transportation Authority	Demand-response and semi-fixed route mode.	Cass County
Dowagiac Dial A Ride	On demand service and requires reservations for pick-up.	Dowagiac with service extended out to Southwest Michigan College.
Kalamazoo County	Type of Service	Area Served
Kalamazoo Metro Transit	Metro Transit accessible, fixed-route service and Metro Van paratransit service. Metro Van provides curb-to-curb transportation service.	Kalamazoo urbanized area, consisting of the cities of Kalamazoo, Portage and Parchment and the townships of Comstock, Cooper, Kalamazoo, Texas and Oshtemo
Care-A-Van		Kalamazoo County

The following tables detail which transportation providers human service agencies are utilizing.

Table 8

Transportation Service Providers Utilized by Agencies	
Organization/Agency	Transportation Service Provider
VBC Human Services	Van Buren Public Transit Volunteer Drivers
Work First/Welfare to Work (Michigan Works!)	Mr. G's Express Advance Cab Bumble Bee Cab Van Buren Transportation Services Lewis Cass ISD Cass Co. Public Transit
Van Buren Community Mental Health Authority	Mental Health Vans Van Buren Public Transit
Area Agency On Aging	Van Buren Care-A-Van Region Care-A-Van Region Medic Choice Van Buren EMS Wil Care Nursing
South Haven Senior Center	Senior Center Vans Volunteer Drivers (in partnership with VB Human Services)

IV. TRANSPORTATION NEEDS

This section of the plan details VBPT's ridership levels and the characteristics of the current ridership. Then a thorough analysis of potential riders is presented. These populations include: seniors, younger children and teens, disabled, low-income, those without a vehicle and non-English speaking individuals. Then trends associated with different trip types are addressed such as: employment, retail and medical, education and training, tourism related and human service agency clients.

VBPT Ridership

Over 1.5 million passenger trips have been provided since VBPT began operations in 1979. The greatest number of passenger trips was recorded in 1993 with over 89,000 rides. However, VBPT total ridership has been decreasing since 2002, with the exception of a slight increase between 2003 and 2004. Current ridership is over 50,000 per year and VBPT expects ridership to decrease to 43,000 rides in FY2006. In FY2006, VBPT expects its largest customers to remain the disabled population under the age of 59 (representing 64% of the ridership). The second largest customer is expected to remain passengers under 60 and not disabled (representing 24% of ridership). Table 9 reflects total ridership and the number of rides for each passenger category from 2002 to 2006.

Table 9

VBPT Ridership by Passenger Characteristic⁵					
Passenger Category	FY2006*	FY2005*	FY2004	FY2003	FY2002
Senior Citizens (over 60)	3,450	6,486	4,100	6,443	8,278
Disabled	27,500	31,005	30,789	30,292	30,301
Senior and Disabled	1,750	3,183	2,266	3,051	3,328
Under 60 not disabled	10,300	11,226	16,433	12,606	14,967
Total	43,000	51,900	53,588	53,392	56,874

*Budget estimates

The following table shows the types of trips taken by demand response riders of VBPT as recorded by VBPT drivers. The most common trip type was for personal business (37% of total) and the second most common trip type was for employment purposes (31% of total).

Table 10

VBPT Number of Trips by Trip Type FY2004		
Trip Type	Number of Trips	Percent of Total Trips Recorded
Work	10,692	31%
Going to school	2,358	7%
Going shopping	3,690	11%
Medical visit	3,282	10%
Personal business/go home	12,693	37%
Social or recreation trips	1,290	4%
Total Trips Recorded	34,005	

⁵ MDOT PTMS and VBPT Application for 2006 Funding 5311

Table 11 (below) indicates the number of passengers by service from 2000 to 2004. The services include South Haven and Paw Paw Dial-A-Rides, countywide reservations, special contracted services and the various agency-contracted services. In FY2004, South Haven Dial-A-Ride represented 34 percent of the total VBPT ridership. Paw Paw Dial-A-Ride service represented 5.7 percent of the total VBPT ridership. Countywide reservation service represented 5.0 percent of total VBPT ridership. In 2004, special contracts accounted for 6.0 percent and agency contracts accounted for 49 percent of total ridership.

Table 11

Number of Passengers By Service ⁶					
	FY2004	FY2003	FY2002	FY2001	FY2000
Service/Contracting Agency	# of Passengers	# of Passengers	# of Passengers	# of Passengers	# of Passengers
Paw Paw Dial-A-Ride	3,062	3,017	3,365	4,254	4,043
South Haven Dial-A-Ride	18,141	17,787	18,819	19,651	18,857
Countywide Reservation	2,720	2,935	2,659	3,097	2,947
Special Contracts (events & trolley)	3,287	1,700	3,784	3,255	2,387
Mental Health-Rehabilitation	15,762	14,043	13,818	17,472	20,109
Mental Health-PSR	7,716	9,461	10,611	10,950	10,825
Mental Health - Day	365	385	421	623	925
Rehab/Work	0	0	0	0	804
Autumn House	1,194	1,304	1,206	567	0
Family Resource	0	162	0	0	0
Public Health	436	470	391	536	780
Community Education – Bangor	0	0	196	581	0
Dowagiac Schools	450	296	0	0	0
South Haven Public Schools	101	663	872	555	359
South Haven Hospital/Youth & Co.	0	0	0	94	0
P.H.P./Hospital	140	0	0	0	0
MI Works - Work First	0	0	0	0	96
MI Works - Job Access	214	169	0	0	0
Total	53,588	52,392	56,142	61,635	62,132

Transportation Disadvantaged Populations

Overview

With a growing population, VBC has a growing need for public transit. VBC recorded a 12 percent increase in total population from 1980 to 2000. The county also experienced an approximate 2.6 percent increase from 2000 to 2003 with an estimated population count of 78,210 in 2003.⁷

⁶ VBPT Records

⁷ U.S. Census 2000

VBC can expect to see a continued steady population growth according to the most recent county-level population projections available, which are based on the 1990 U.S. Census. VBC's population is expected to grow to almost 100,000 by 2020.

With this growing population in VBC, there is a growing need for public transit especially for certain disadvantaged segments of the population. Nationwide, in comparison with metro areas, rural counties have higher levels of poverty and have larger shares of disabled and elderly residents.⁸ In 1999, approximately 7.9 million people in non-metro areas lived in poverty, representing about 14.6 percent of the rural population, compared to a metro poverty rate of 11.8 percent (26 million individuals). And, 11 million individuals (excluding those under 5 years old) in non-metro areas were classified as disabled in 2000, accounting for 21.5 percent of rural America, compared to a disability rate of 18.8 percent in metro areas (38.8 million disabled individuals). Non-metro areas had 7.8 million elderly residents (at least 65 years of age) in 2000, accounting for 13.8 percent of the non-metro population, compared to an elderly rate of 11 percent for metro counties (25.6 million elderly metro residents).⁹

Transportation service is vital for rural America's 30 million non-drivers, who include senior citizens, low-income families, and persons with disabilities. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, VBC has 1,394 households without a vehicle. In the sections that follow, transportation disadvantaged populations are described to offer insight into the growing need for public transit in VBC.

Age

The Senior Population

Transportation is one of the greatest concerns expressed by the senior population. Access to transportation affects a person's ability to eat, to get medical treatment, to work, and to socialize. In general, the limitations of a transportation system will impose special burdens not only on the aging population, but also on relatives and social service and health-care institutions on which many elderly citizens depend.

In the *2004 Annual Report of the Michigan State Advisory Council on Aging*, the Council identified five interdependent factors/characteristics that create an "elderly-friendly" community. Transportation was one of the factors that lead to an elderly-friendly community along with supportive community systems, access to health care, safety and security and housing.

In 2002 the Michigan Department of Career Development commissioned a report summarizing regional strategic plans. For the Berrien, Cass, and VBC region the report listed emerging trends which showed housing and ***lack of transportation*** as barriers to employment as well as an aging workforce and young adults moving away from the region when they are old enough to leave home.

⁸ U.S. Census 2000

⁹ Brown, <http://www.nal.usda.gov/ric/ricpubs/publictrans.htm>

Contrary to previous generations, the current older population grew up in a physical landscape and personal lifestyle dominated by the use of the automobile; approximately 95 percent of those persons who will reach age 65 in 2010 have driver licenses. It is clear that as a result of better health and improvements in health science, a greater percentage of elderly will be able to continue driving. At the same time, the report *Mobility and Independence: Changes and Challenges for Older Drivers*¹⁰ states that older drivers who face the prospect of reducing or terminating their driving will suffer a variety of undesirable consequences, including: reduced mobility, loss of personal independence, social isolation, and a reduction in their access to essential services. The loss of license will precipitate a personal crisis, unknown to previous generations.¹¹ More than one in five Americans (21 percent) age 65 years and older do not currently drive. In rural areas, 61 percent of older non-drivers stay home on a given day compared with 43 percent in more urban areas.¹²

The demographic shape of the population in the United States will shift dramatically in the next 20 years and transportation agencies will find themselves confronted with a very different customer base.¹³ In 2002, 12 percent of the population in the United States was age 65 years or older. By 2025, the number of seniors will have gone up by 79 percent, and an estimated 18 percent of the population will be 65 or older. The U.S. Census estimates the total population of people aged 65 and over to be 62 million in the year 2025. In 26 states, more than 20 percent - one in five residents - will be over the age of 65.

Recent population projections show VBC's growth trends to be similar to national trends and will also likely experience a growing elderly population. The following table shows projected changes in the total population and the population of persons age 55 years and older in VBC from 2000 to 2030.

Table 12

Projected Changes in Population 2000 to 2030 VBC¹⁴				
	Total Population	Percent Change	Population Age 55 years and older	Percent Change
1990	(Actual) 70,060		15,045	
2000	(Actual) 76,263	+8.9%	16,448	+9.3%
2030	(Projected) 89,468	+17.3%	27,544	+67.5%

Map #2 shows the current distribution of the 60⁺-year-old population in VBC. There are a few clusters of elderly, but the population is generally spread throughout the county. In the future, the growing elderly population will impose greater demands for public transit in VBC and the distribution of this population will continue to provide challenges to efficiently provide transportation for the elderly to get to the places they need to go for medical services, shopping and other necessities.

¹⁰ Jon Burkhardt, et al., "Mobility and Independence: Changes and Challenges for Older Drivers," 1998, <http://www.ctaa.org/ct/sep0ct99/burkhardt.asp>

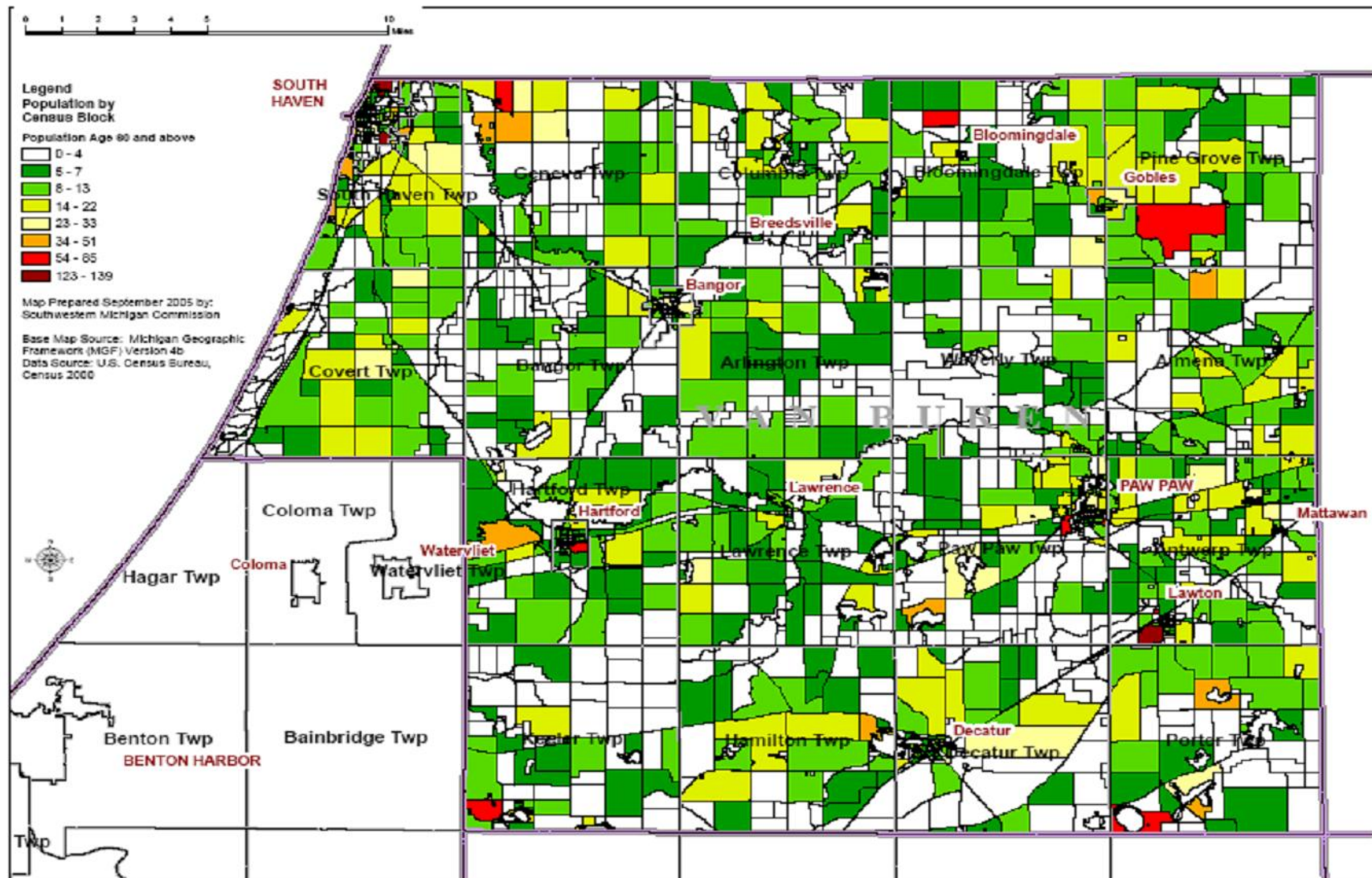
¹¹ Brendon Hemily, "Trends Affecting Public Transit's Effectiveness," Nov. 2004, https://www.apta.com/government_affairs/policy/documents/trends_affecting.pdf

¹² Linda Bailey, "Surface Transportation Policy Project," April 2004, <http://www.apta.com/sim/stranded.html>

¹³ Bailey, <http://www.apta.com/sim/stranded.html>

¹⁴ SWMC 2000 Extract

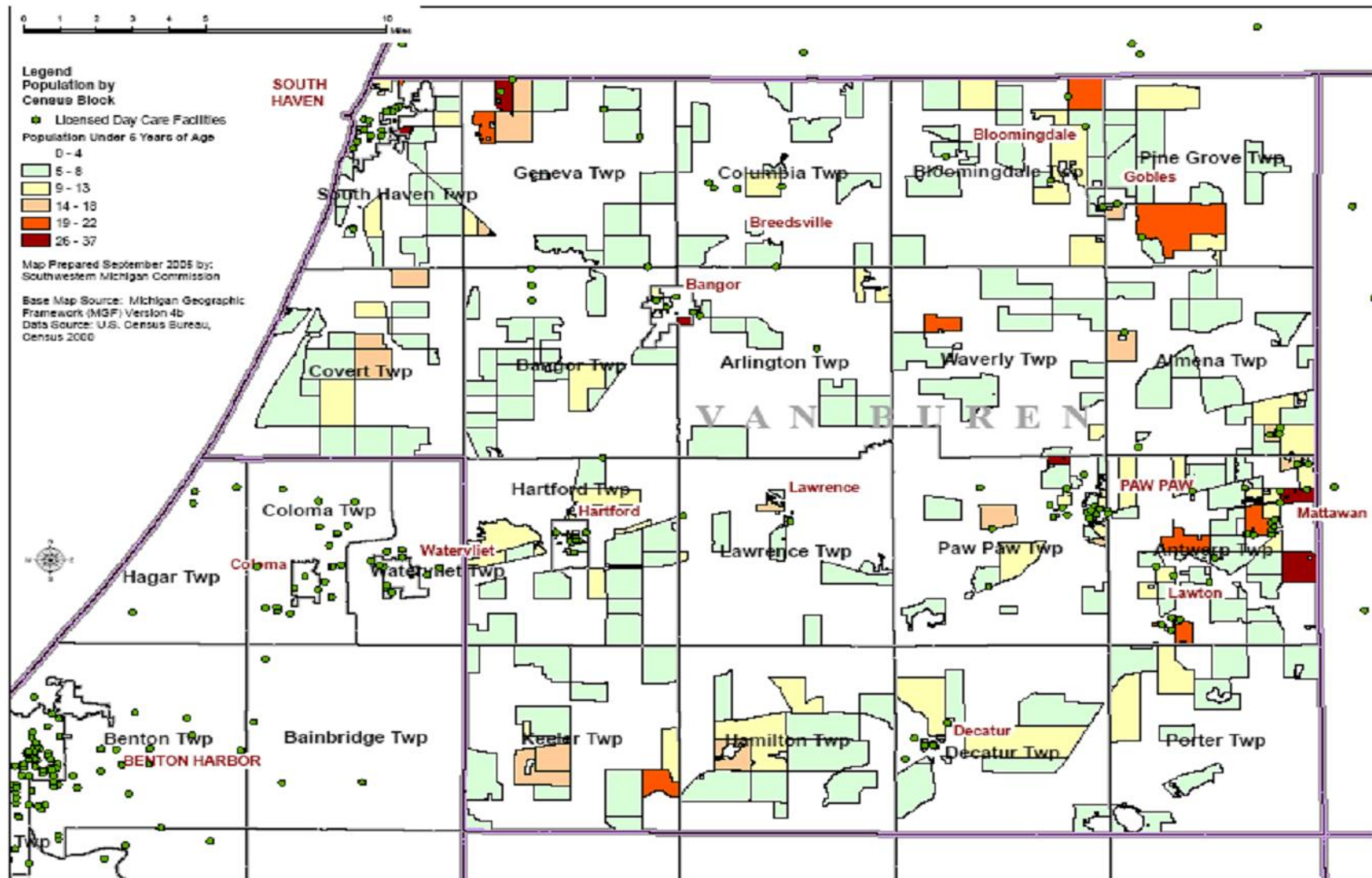
Map 2 Population distribution of residents age 60 years and over



The Younger Population

In addition to the impact on public transportation needs generated by the projected increase in the elderly population, there are two other age groups that may increasingly rely on public transportation; 1) families with children less than six years of age, and 2) teens less than 17 years of age. Map #3 displays the location of children less than six years of age and the location of licensed day care providers. This map indicates that often the daycare centers are not located near the populations: another example of the disconnect between people and the places they need to go in a rural landscape. For parents (especially those with no vehicle available) with children less than six years old, may find that transportation to daycare is a barrier to finding and maintaining employment. Public transit could examine the demand and the costs to better accommodate this need.

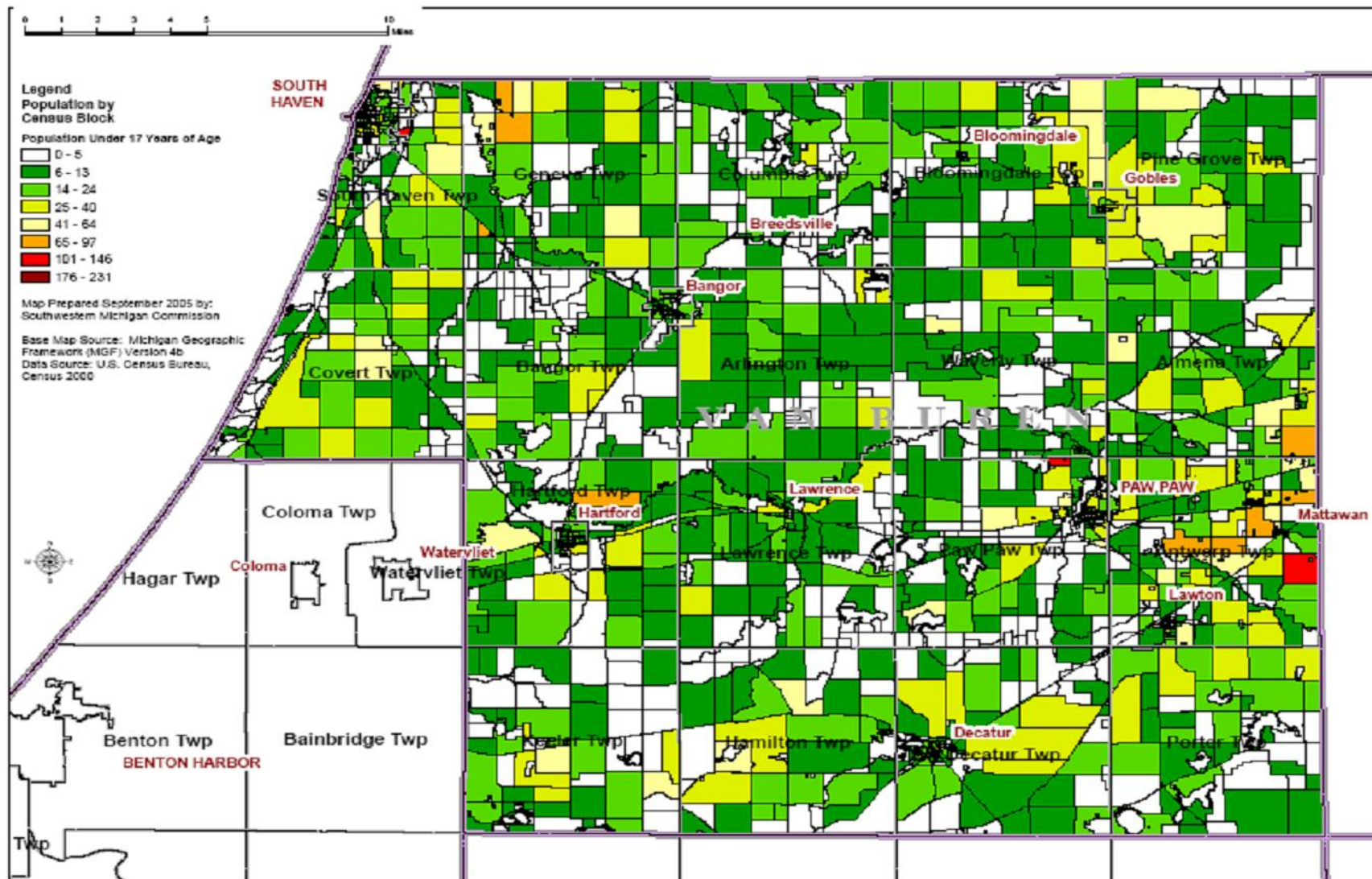
Map 3 Distribution of children less than 6 years of age and licensed day care facilities



For the population of school age (over 6 years) but less than 17 years of age, there are possible transportation needs for recreation, school, and/or work related purposes that could be served by public transit. A consideration, especially for the less than 17 years old population is that the National Safety Council estimates that riding the bus is over 170 times safer than automobile travel. Many transit systems now formally serve as safe havens for children and students moving throughout communities in the U.S.¹⁵ VBPT could institute specific marketing efforts and incentives to attract these younger riders who may not have access to a vehicle.

¹⁵ "How Public Transportation Serves and Benefits U.S. Communities," 17 April 2002, http://www.apta.com/government_affairs/aptatest/04172002.cfm

Map 4 Population distribution below 17 years of age



Disabilities

In the United States, there are 49.7 million persons with disabilities, and 21.2 million report having a condition that limits basic physical activities such as walking, reaching, lifting or carrying.¹⁶ Of the disabled population 30 percent cite having problems with inadequate transportation compared to 10 percent of the general population.¹⁷ Public transit can help the disabled population participate more fully in the economy and society in general by providing access to jobs and to community functions.

Historically, disabled persons have made up the majority of VBPT's ridership. In FY2004, 33,055 of the 53,588 total rides on transit were disabled persons. The table below compares the number of persons over age 5 years with a disability in VBC with those in the State of Michigan and the United States. In 2000, VBC had a higher percentage of disabled persons than the State of Michigan and the U.S. Map 5 shows the distribution of disabled persons in VBC. The highest concentrations of disabled persons are in Covert, South Haven, Lawrence and Paw Paw areas.

Table 13

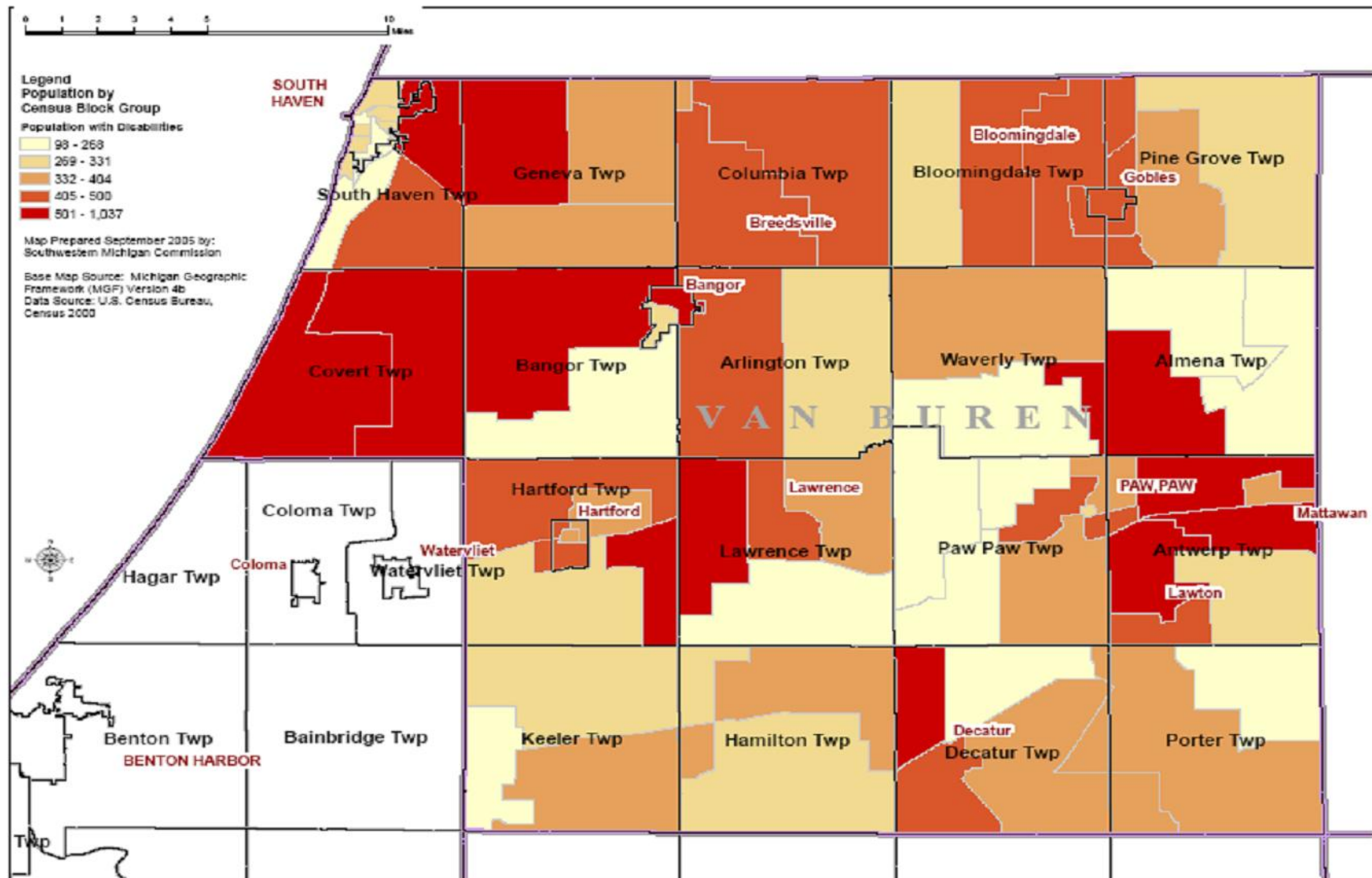
Disabled Population 2000¹⁸			
	VBC	State of Michigan	United States
Total population	76,263	9,938,444	290,809,777
Persons with a disability, age 5+	15,116	1,711,231	49,746,248
Percent of population	20%	17%	17%

Public transit options are a vital link for citizens with disabilities. Many disabled persons do not own or operate a personal vehicle and may rely on public transportation for access to employment, education and training, medical services and independent living opportunities. The high percentage of disabled persons in VBC poses some unique challenges to VBPT. VBPT must ensure that its vehicles continue to be accessible to disabled populations and that its services and employees meet the needs of this population.

¹⁶ U.S. Census 2000

¹⁷ "The Harris Poll #34," 5 July 2000, http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=97

¹⁸ U.S. Census 2000

Map 5 Population distribution of residents with disabilities

Low Income

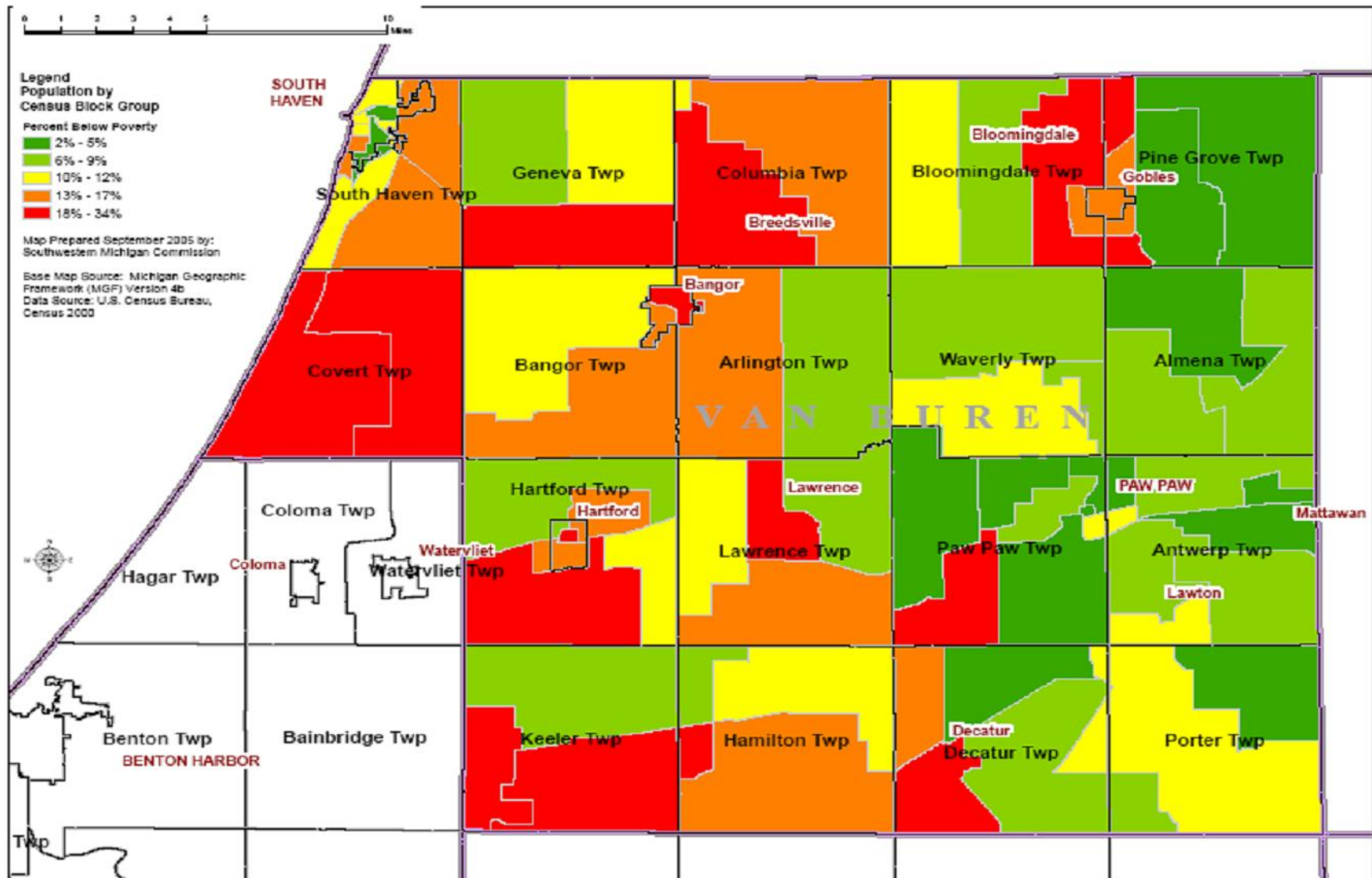
Public transportation offers mobility for residents of rural America, particularly people without cars, who tend to be lower-income. Overall usage of transit services in rural America is not high – only 0.5 percent of non-metro residents use public transit as the primary means of transportation to work.¹⁹ In areas suffering from high unemployment, vulnerable populations have a particular need for public transportation because their options for personal mobility may be severely limited. The per capita income in VBC is \$17,878. As seen in the following table, the 1999 median household income and the per capita money income in VBC are lower than the State of Michigan.

Table 14

Income Levels 1999		
	Median household income 1999	Per capita money income 1999
VBC	\$39,365	\$17,878
State of Michigan	\$44,667	\$22,168

In VBC, 8,465 residents are below poverty level (11.10 percent in 1999). This means that 7.8 percent of the families are living below the poverty line. According to a Standard and Poor's 2005 report, 42 percent of VBC's population is economically disadvantaged. In comparison, the State of Michigan reported 10.5 percent of persons below poverty level in 1999 and 34 percent as being economically disadvantaged. People living in poverty, including low-income working people and low-income families, comprise a significant portion of transit riders. Map #6 shows the locations of residents in VBC that are below the poverty level. Many of the highest concentrations of these residents are not located near employment, retail or medical centers. An important consideration for those living below the poverty level is the fare charged for using public transit. High fares will pose another roadblock to low-income individuals and families who are looking for work, going to work, or attempting to access necessities such as nutritious food, health care, childcare and other integral components of life.

¹⁹ U.S. Census, 2000

Map 6 Percentage of residents below poverty level

No Vehicle Available

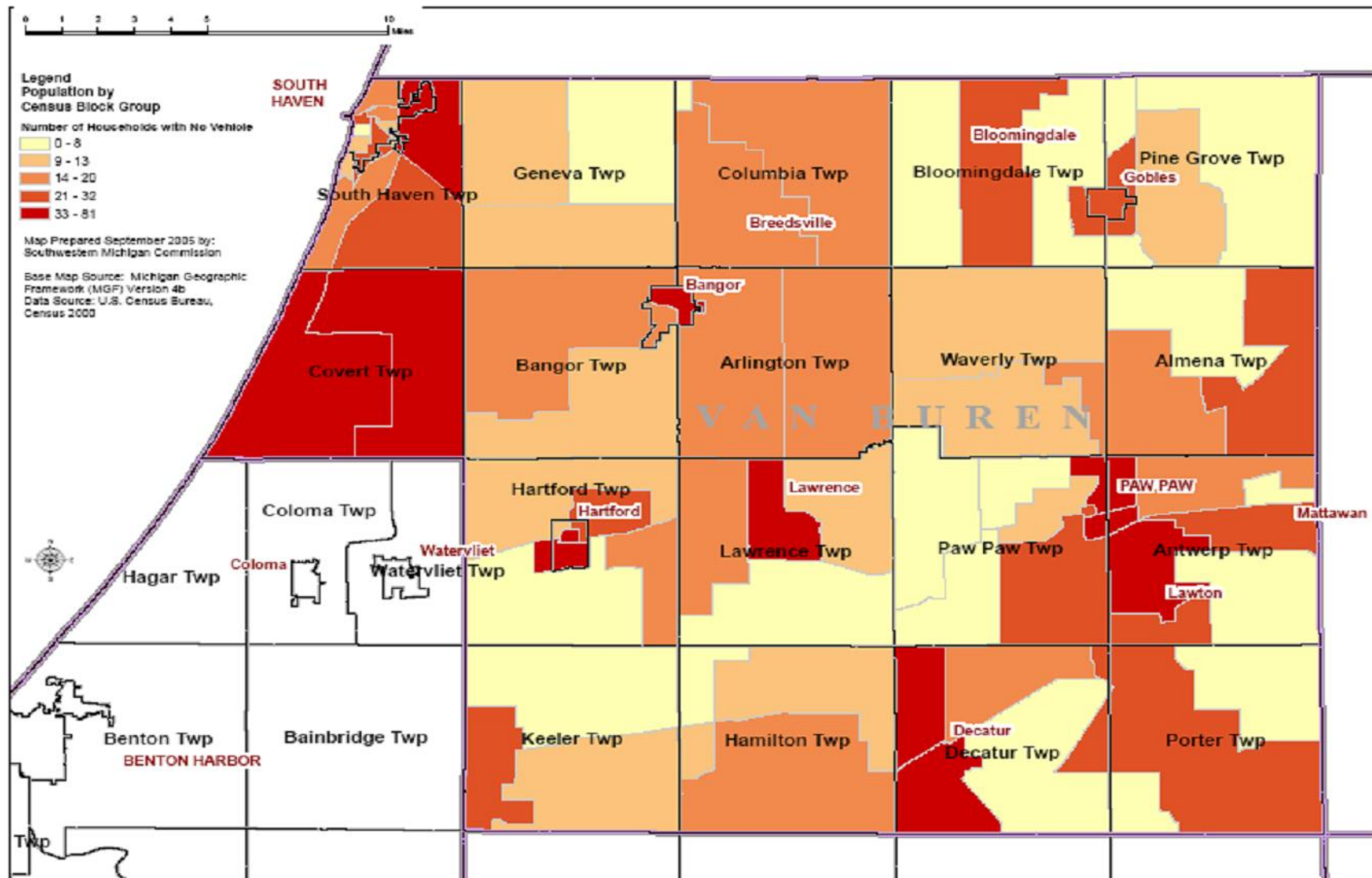
Census data reveals that the vehicle ownership rate is higher in rural America than in metro areas, with 92.7 percent of rural households having access to a car in 2000, compared to 88.9 percent for metro counties.²⁰ Still, nationwide more than 1.6 million rural households do not have access to a car.

Among public assistance recipients nationally, almost 94 percent do not own cars, and rely on public transportation for basic mobility. Under SAFETEA-LU (and its predecessor TEA-21), the JARC program brings together transportation planners and operators to tackle the unique challenges of job-seekers from low income areas; it is successfully producing a diverse set of services to meet these needs. Many of the services are paratransit services, such as guaranteed-ride home programs, special shuttle and van services, demand-responsive Dial-A-Ride services, and late night and weekend services.²¹

There are a total of 1,394 households with no vehicle in VBC according to the 2000 U.S. Census. The following maps show the general locations of households with no vehicle in VBC and those who rely on public transportation (bus) to get to work. Public transportation can help to bridge the mobility divide existing for individuals in rural areas without vehicles, opening up access to employment, training, and social services.

²⁰ U.S. Census 2000

²¹ Jennifer Dorn, "Report to Subcommittee on Highways and Transit," 17 April 2002, <http://www.house.gov/transportation/highway/04-17-02/dorn.html>

Map 7 Number of households with no vehicle

Map 8 Home to work trips for all employees using a bus



Non-English Speaking

As the population's cultural and ethnic diversity continues to change, there are a growing number of individuals in VBC who are not able to speak or read English well. In addition to the impact this might have on the ability to obtain a driver's license for a growing number of people, there is also the potential for a significant communication problem to develop between those needing transportation services and those who are able to provide it. Many public agencies are beginning to provide information in both English and Spanish to accommodate a growing Hispanic population in the area.

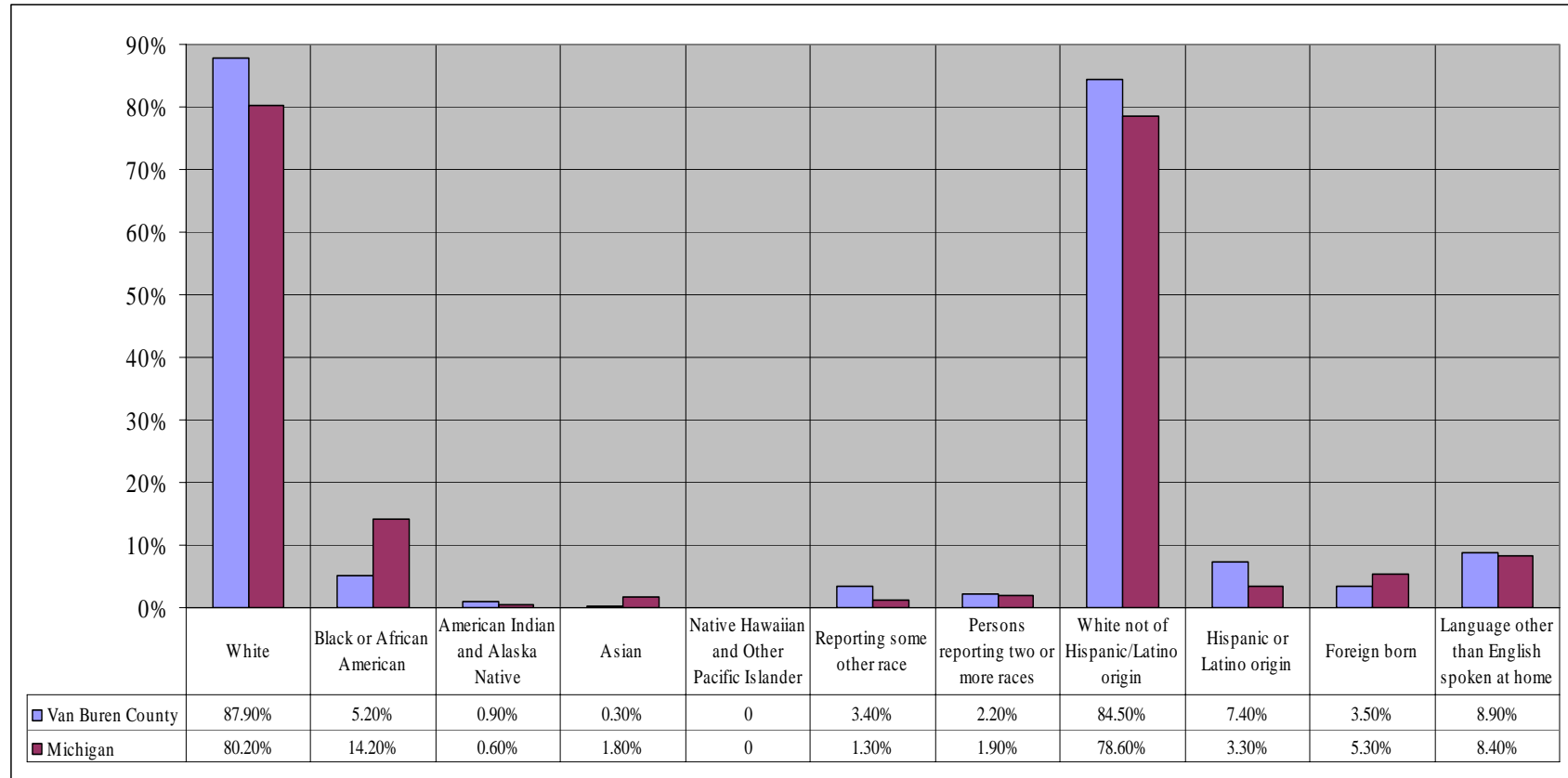
In VBC, 8.9 percent of the population speaks a language other than English at home. There are also populations that do not speak English at all; 7 percent of the non-English population in VBC speaks only Spanish.

Table 15

Population and Language Spoken			
Area	Population age 5+	Speaks only English	Speaks a language other than English
United States	262,375,152	82.10%	17.90%
Michigan	9,268,782	91.60%	8.40%
VBC	71,045	91.10%	8.90%

Figure 1 on the following page shows the distribution of cultural diversity in VBC compared with the State of Michigan. VBC has a higher percentage of Hispanic or Latino origin population than the State of Michigan and a higher percentage of those speaking a language other than English.

Figure 1



Trip Types

VBPT's hours are not extensive or frequent enough to meet the needs of casual riders who have other options. Given the funding and budget, VBPT is geared to serve those who have no other options and need public transportation to reach their destination. Serving the needs of entry-level workers, seniors, and the disabled could generate the largest economic benefit to VBPT as well as the entire county. VBPT can maximize the economic benefits to riders and the community if focus is placed on generating the types of trips that are traditionally shown to create the largest economic benefits, which include 1) employment, 2) education and training, 3) medical services (particularly dialysis), and 4) trips that promote independent living, especially for the elderly and persons with disabilities.

It is clear that other trips are beneficial as well. However, the four types of trips listed above offer the greatest economic potential for the communities VBPT serves. An overall issue for VBPT to consider is being responsive to the needs of the passengers or potential passengers. In order to serve trips of the four types identified above, Van Buren Public Transit will need to meet the specific requirements that must be fulfilled by each type of trip. The most important requirements are destinations, hours of service and costs. Trips must be offered at the times (hours of the day; days of the week) required by the nature of the trip purpose. Each of the trip types requires separate consideration. If these trip requirements cannot be met, VBPT's service will not be successful in keeping current riders and attracting new riders.

Employment

Employment trends affect how public transit service is delivered. Nationally, the proportion of work travel in peak hours is decreasing, and spreading into other time periods. In general employment sites are increasingly dispersed. With over 70 percent of civilian employees in the service sector, this type of employment presents some unique transportation needs. The job growth in the service sector is dispersed, not concentrated. Service businesses tend to be smaller in size and employees' schedules vary over the short-term.²² VBPT may need to be more flexible in service hours and be creative to efficiently meet the needs of a low population density with an employment base that is scattered throughout the county and often in neighboring counties.

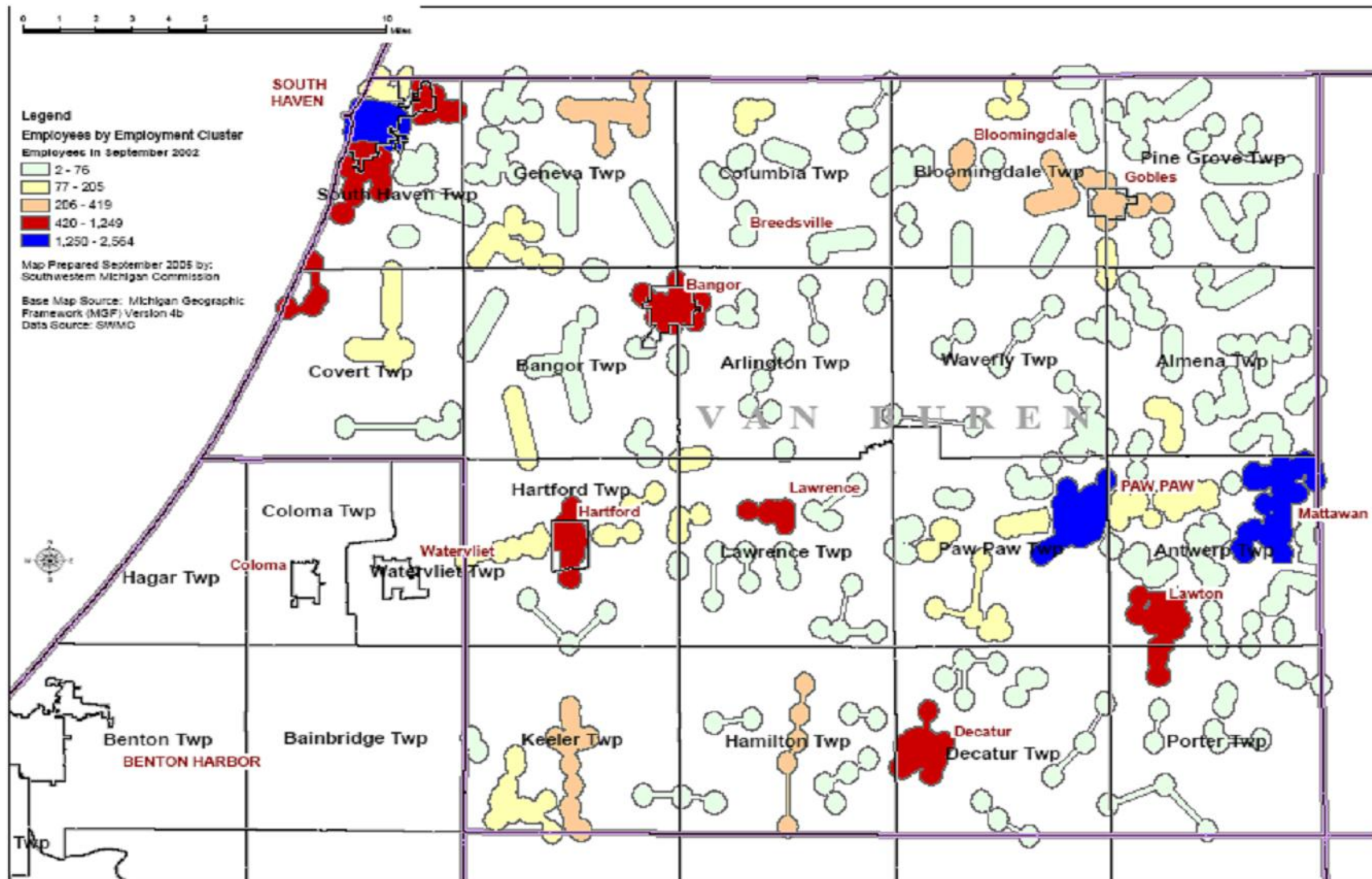
To better understand the employment and travel patterns in VBC, the following maps will show the employment clusters in VBC, the distribution of employees by municipality, and the number of trips potentially transportation disadvantaged workers take from home to work.

Primary employment clusters are in the South Haven, Paw Paw, and Mattawan areas. Secondary employment clusters are in Bangor, Hartford, Lawrence, Decatur, and Lawton (See Map #9). The municipalities that have the highest number of employees are the City of South Haven and South Haven Township, Paw Paw Village, Mattawan Village, Lawton Village, City of Bangor and Covert Township (see Map #10). As shown in Map #11, there are many VBC residents traveling to work out of the county. Map #12 shows that the workers that may fit the transportation disadvantaged characteristics (those without vehicles and those below the poverty level) are also traveling outside of VBC for employment.

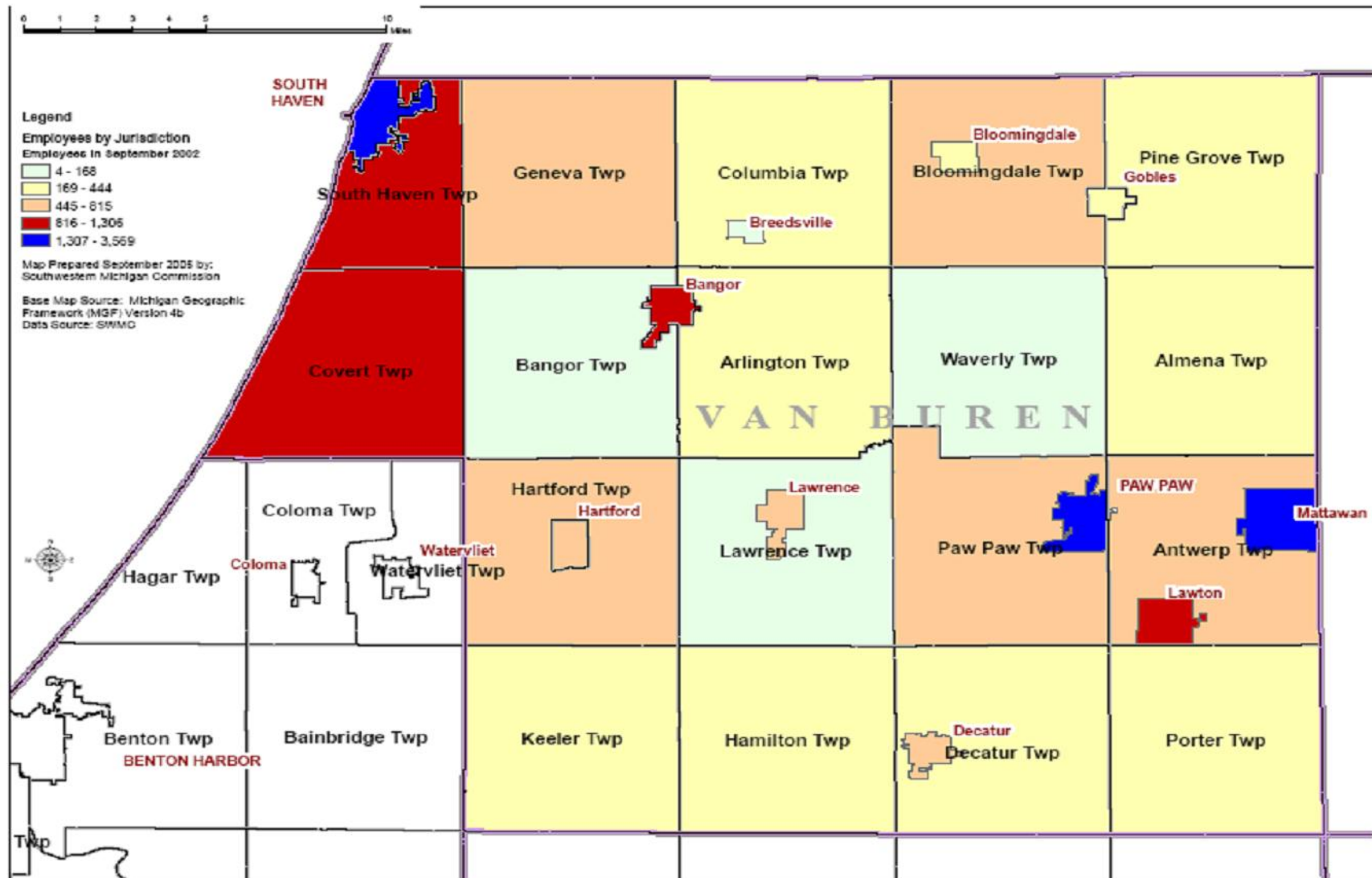
²² Hemily, https://www.apta.com/government_affairs/policy/trends_affecting.cfm

Currently, VBPT does not provide much out of county transportation. VBPT could examine the possibility of connecting to the Kalamazoo Public Transit system to serve those living on the eastern edge of VBC and traveling to Kalamazoo for employment.

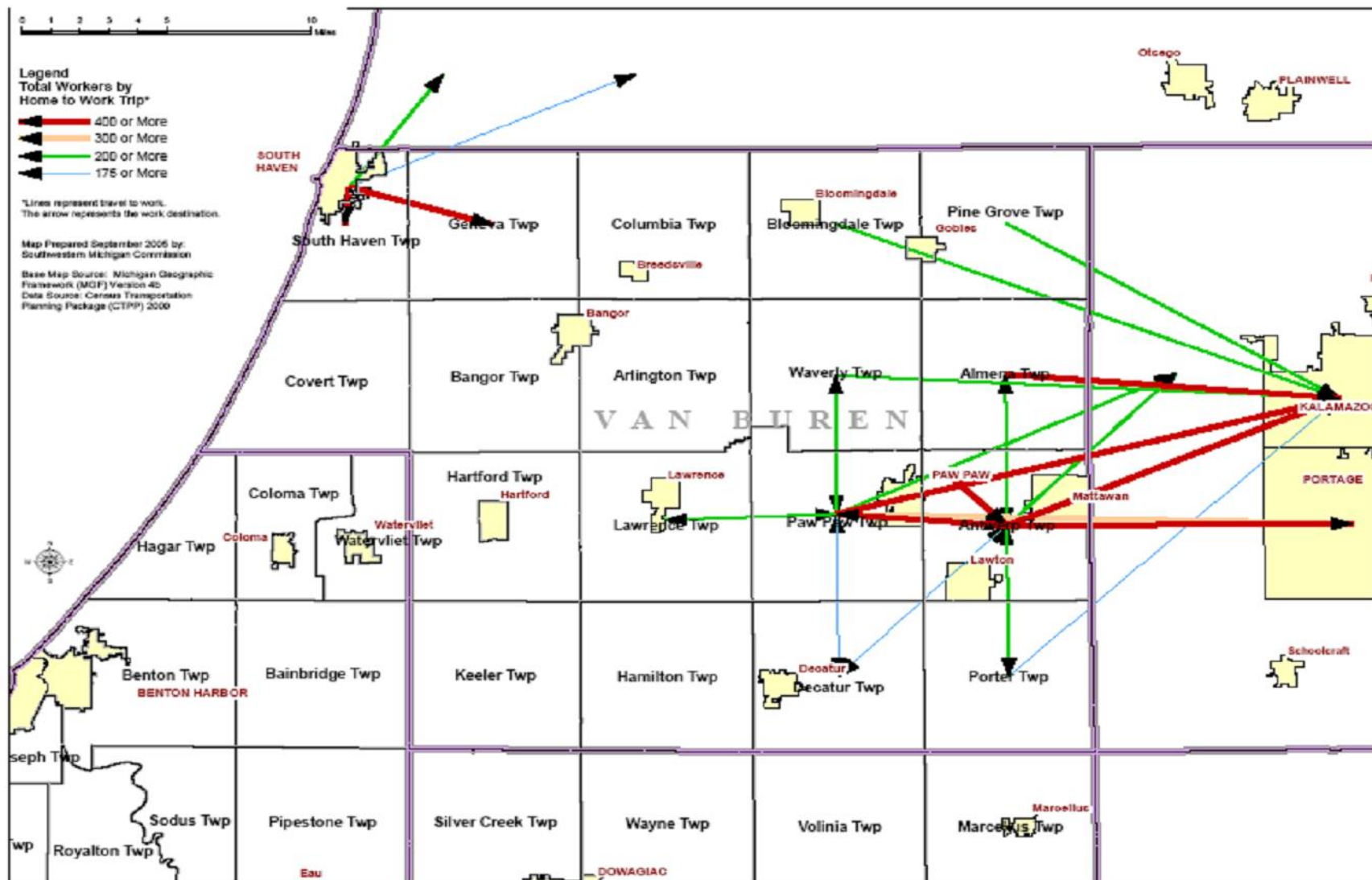
Map 9 Employment clusters as of September 2002



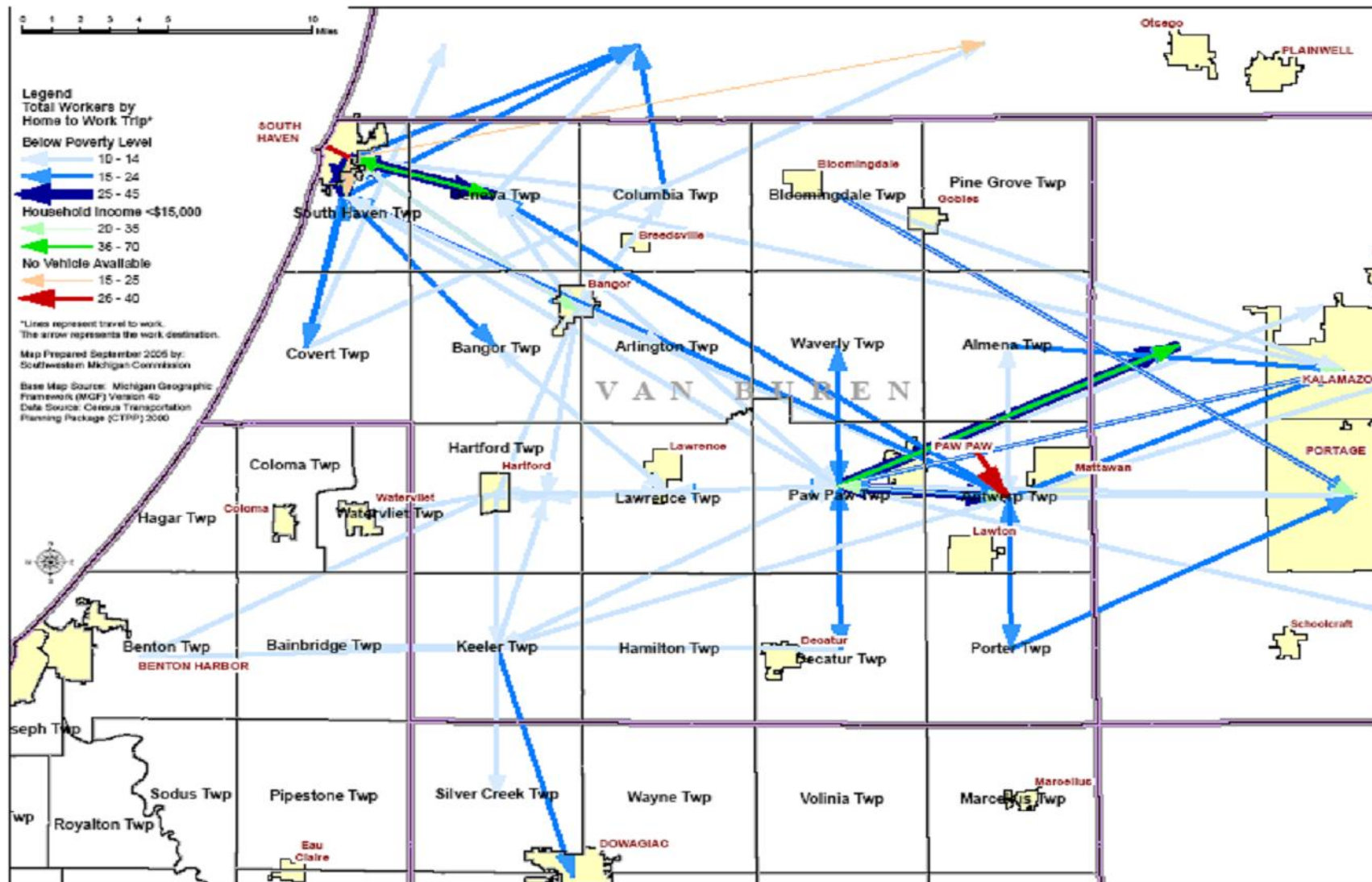
Map 10 Distribution of employees per municipality



Map 11 Home to work trips for all employees



Map 12 Home to work trips for employees below poverty level



Retail and Medical Services

A large trip generator for VBPT is retail and medical services. The majority of retail shopping centers and medical service providers are located in the South Haven and Paw Paw areas. The two hospitals within VBC are South Haven Community Hospital in South Haven and Lakeview Community Hospital in Paw Paw. In addition, each village and city in the county also has some shopping, services and medical offices or clinics. Specifically, grocery stores are located in South Haven, Paw Paw, Bangor, Hartford, Gobles, and Decatur. For many residents, traveling to Benton Harbor, Kalamazoo, Holland, or even Grand Rapids for shopping and medical services is often preferred and/or sometimes necessary. VBPT could form partnerships with retail and medical services to better serve client needs and to increase ridership.

Education and Training Services

There are few education and training site locations in VBC. Therefore there may be opportunities to group larger numbers of people for travel to education and training sites. There are basically four types of education and training trips to serve in VBC: 1) Worker training programs through Michigan Works! Work First Program, 2) Secondary education, 3) K-12 education, and 4) Daycare.

Michigan Works! offices providing training for clients are located in South Haven and Paw Paw. VBPT could consider working with Michigan Works! staff to coordinate rides for clients in the most efficient manner.

Schools and colleges can also be trip generators for VBPT. Lake Michigan College (LMC) is the only secondary education institution located within VBC. LMC is located on the northeast corner of the City of South Haven. This area of South Haven also contains a large retail store, a dialysis center and a low-income apartment complex. Many residents attend colleges outside of VBC, such as LMC in Benton Harbor, Southwestern Michigan College in Dowagiac or Niles or one of the many universities in Kalamazoo. Because of class schedules it would probably be difficult for VBPT to serve the colleges and universities outside of the county, but there may be an opportunity to partner with LMC's South Haven campus to provide more accommodating transportation services for their students.

The school districts in Van Buren and Cass Counties have utilized VBPT's services. With the recent cuts in hours and drivers, VBPT is now having difficulty serving school district needs. If VBPT service is expanded, the school systems and Head Start should be thought of as potential partners. The school districts in VBC include:

Bangor Public Schools
Bloomington Public Schools
Covert Public Schools
Decatur Public Schools
Gobles Public Schools
Hartford Public Schools

Lawrence Public Schools
Lawton Community Schools
Mattawan Consolidated Schools
Paw Paw Public Schools
South Haven Public Schools
Van Buren Intermediate School
District and Vocational Tech Center

Day care locations are shown in Map #3 and are also potential trip generators. VBPT could provide and market services directly to parents through the day care providers or through the human service agencies that assist parents in day care arrangements and transportation.

Tourism Related Travel

Several high-growth, non-metro, recreation counties are among the highest users of public transportation in rural America. In these rural counties, the highest demand on public transportation is often from low-income workers and tourists. For example, in Colorado, Eagle County (home of Vail) and Summit County (where Breckenridge and Copper Mountain ski resorts are located) both had high rates of population growth during the 1990s and they have a high rate of ridership on public transportation (with more than 5 percent of their workers using transit as a primary means of transportation to work). Other non-metro counties with high growth and relatively high transit use are Dukes, Massachusetts (home of Martha's Vineyard); Worcester, Maryland (Ocean City); and Beaufort, South Carolina (Hilton Head Island). Local officials in these areas have recognized that transit is an important tool for making local recreation-based economies run more efficiently, bringing in workers, reducing congestion, and providing mobility options for residents and tourists.

VBC also has a significant tourist economy. VBPT may be able to market and provide services to high demand destinations such as Van Buren State Park, the beaches in South Haven and to downtown South Haven from local hotels. There are many festivals held throughout the year that VBPT could market and provide contract services. Below is a list of some of the most popular festivals in the area.

Table 16

Festivals in VBC		
Community	Festival	Time
South Haven	Ice Breaker	February
	Harbor fest	June -Father's Day Weekend
	Annual Fine Art Fair	4 th of July Weekend
	4 th of July Celebration	4 th of July Weekend
	Festival of Cars	July
	Garden Walk	July
	National Blueberry Festival and Fly-In South Haven Airport	2 nd full weekend in August
	Annual All Crafts Fair	Labor Day Weekend
	Hometown Holidays Hospice Home Tour	December
	Holidays in the Village	November – December
Bangor	Apple Festival	2 nd Weekend in October
Lawrence	Ox Roast	Labor Day Weekend
Paw Paw	Paw Paw Days	3 rd Weekend in July
	Wine and Harvest Festival	Weekend after Labor Day
	Christmas in the Village	December
Other	Michigan Flywheelers Antique and Tractor Show	Weekend after Labor Day
	VBC Fair	Mid-July

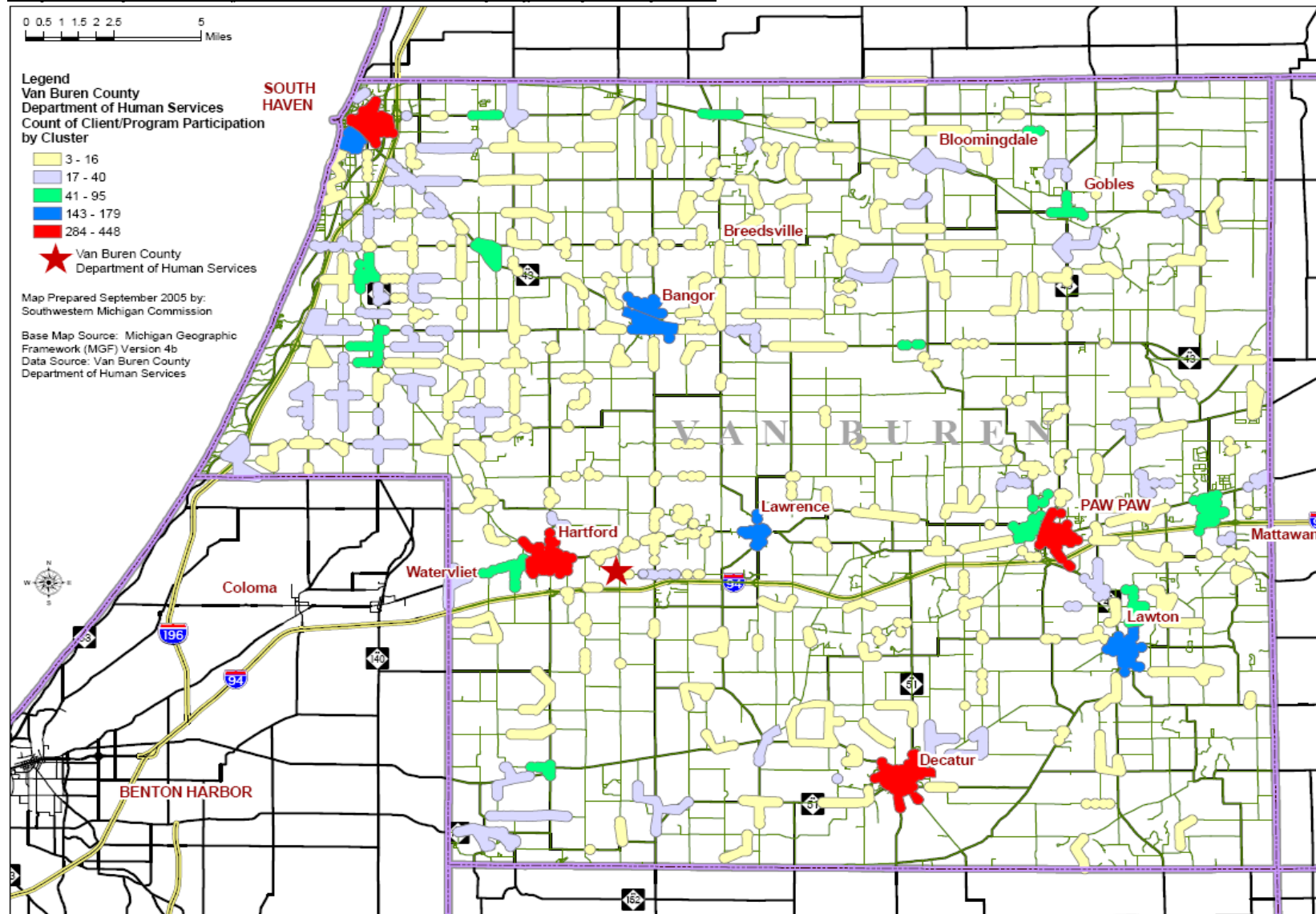
Human Service Agencies

VBC faces many challenges delivering social services to its residents because of its low population density and the high rate of its population receiving public assistance payments. In 2004 the Michigan Department of Human Services reported that 14 percent of Van Buren residences were receiving some form of public assistance. The entire state of Michigan's overall percentage in 2004 was 10 percent of the population receiving public assistance payments.

The costs per capita associated with service delivery tend to be higher in VBC because of the lower population density. With the current decline in state revenues, agencies are reexamining their priorities in service provision and are striving to provide the best support possible in the most cost-effective manner. As evidenced in Map #13, the locations of the Department of Human Services clients are spread throughout the county. However, a few clusters of clients do emerge on the map and this map could be utilized to develop a more coordinated transportation service for these clients needing to get to agency office locations or to provide other trips such as training, employment, medical or independent living trips. The number of clients in Map #13 may be recipients of multiple programs and therefore be counted more than once. A more detailed map is available at SWMPC, but not published in this report because of confidentiality issues.

Often, human service agencies need to find or provide transportation to their clients, which can be very challenging and costly in a rural community. The role of these entities varies, with some agencies engaging in the purchase of vehicles and hiring of drivers, some utilizing volunteers or private providers (taxi services) and others contracting with rural transit operators such as VBPT. It is often difficult to measure the magnitude of these services since transportation costs are often bundled with the overall cost of providing service to the client.

Map 13 Department of Human Services client/program participation



An *Agency Transportation Survey* was sent to twenty-eight social service providers with clients in VBC. Thirteen surveys were returned and compiled. (Complete results are in the Appendix.) The survey results will provide a better understanding of the transportation needs of the agencies and will point out opportunities to coordinate or provide services.

Services provided by the surveyed agencies include job placement, senior services, health and medical assistance, education, and the provision of meals. Assistance is provided to residents of all ages (defined as age 3 years – 60⁺ years). Seven of the responding agencies serve all of VBC; two include Cass County and three include Berrien County. The number of clients served per year range from 300 to 7,000. The typical agency provides services Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. with one being available twenty-four hours per day, seven days a week, and one offering services only from September through May (Head-Start). Seven agencies provided services to clients at more than one location.

When asked how many clients are unable to drive themselves, or do not have a car available, the answers varied from at least 200 clients to the vast majority of all clients. Some reported that between 45 and 65 percent of their total clientele were unable to drive themselves. Agencies reporting the transportation methods used by clients include: nine agencies reporting that their clients ride with family or friends; eight drive themselves; five carpool with other clients; four have volunteers bring them; and four use the public transportation system. Other methods included the use of agency-owned vehicles and private taxi service.

Survey Question: “How do clients get to your center/site?” (Check all that apply)

# of Responses	Response
9	Ride with family or friends
8	Drive themselves
5	Carpool with other clients
4	Public transportation system
4	Volunteers bring them
3	Agency operates vehicles
3	Staff brings them
1	Taxi
1	Live in group home/transported in group home vehicle
1	Another agency transports them
1	Consolidated agency transportation system
1	Other: Parents/Guardians

The following table shows the transportation service providers used by social service agencies in VBC as reported in the *Agency Transportation Survey* taken in May 2005 and from invoices from the Michigan Works!, Project Zero program.

Table 17

Transportation Service Providers Utilized by Agencies	
Organization/Agency	Transportation Service Provider
VBC Human Services	Van Buren Public Transit Volunteer Drivers
Work First/Welfare to Work	Mr. G's Express Advance Cab Bumble Bee Cab Van Buren Transportation Services Lewis Cass ISD Cass Co. Public Transit
Van Buren Community Mental Health Authority	Mental Health Vans Van Buren Public Transit
Area Agency On Aging	Van Buren Care-A-Van Region Care-A-Van Region Medic Choice Van Buren EMS Wil Care Nursing
South Haven Senior Center	Senior Center Vans

When asked to what extent their current transportation providers met the needs of wheelchair-using clients, the responses included problems with scheduling, volunteers not authorized to handle wheelchair-bound clients, and transportation not being handicap accessible. The need for more options for dialysis patients, assistance in and out of vehicles, and infant/child car seats was also listed.

Three of the agencies responding (Van Buren Community Mental Health Authority, Tri-County Head Start and South Haven Senior Center) own and operate their own vehicles to provide client transportation. Community Mental Health Authority provides transportation to clients for medical appointments, employment, therapeutic social and recreational activities and community integration activities with an average trip length of fifteen miles. The Senior Center accommodates about 15 to 20 riders per day, Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and services the City of South Haven and the townships of South Haven, Geneva and Casco. The South Haven Senior Center also contracts charter services for their clients for events outside of the county.

Ten of the thirteen survey respondents indicated the following problems with their current method of getting clients to their site or service.

- Public Transit is not flexible in timing and scheduling.
- Poorly trained drivers at Public Transit, discussions about clients with other clients, inappropriate discussions about religion and sex by drivers.
- FIA not providing medical transportation, others must pick up slack.
- Our fleet is aging with limited resources to replace vehicles.
- Rising fuel costs an issue for CMH employees driving own vehicles.
- Geographic distances in county present challenges.
- Need alternatives for transporting frail clients to medical appointments and dialysis (door to door wheelchair).

- We use only volunteers, if there are not enough it is a problem. As gas prices increase, we lose volunteers.
- Transportation doesn't run near homes on a regular basis.
- No drivers or transportation for veterans to doctor.
- Care-A-Van is overbooked.
- State/federal funds have been eliminated. We are using 100 percent of program funds to pay for transportation for all clients that need it. If we lose more funds in the future the program may not be able to transport/help them.
- We are unable to service our entire service area and cannot transport wheelchair clients or clients who are unable to get in or out of the minivan. There are many medical needs we cannot accommodate as well; most of our transportation is to and from the senior center for meals and services.

Eight of ten agencies responded that additional transportation services, beyond those now available, are needed in order for their clients to have full access to the services their agency provides. The following comments were received when asked if the agencies had problems with getting their clients to their site or service.

- Transportation options would be great.
- No way to get back and forth to work.
- Clients can't get to our office, our pantries, or to Hartford or Allean to apply for help. Even the public transit service is too expensive for some of them.
- No cross-county service.
- Could shift more CMH provided service to Public Transit; Public Transit could offer evening/weekend service.
- VB County has only two providers that are cost effective. Providers from other counties/areas are too expensive. We are only able to transport a set number of clients based on the availability of the provider's cars; if they lose cars, go out of business, then some clients will be without transportation.

Conclusion

The need for public transit in VBC is evident. It will be a challenge for VBPT to provide flexible, cost effective, efficient and affordable service with decreasing state and federal funds and increased and changing needs of the elderly, disabled and low-income populations. A way to meet this challenge will be to better coordinate transportation services with human service agencies. Coordination will better serve agency clients' needs and provide the most cost effective and efficient transportation for their clients. VBPT has the opportunity to be a leader in this coordination effort.

V. STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS SERVICE GAPS

The sections that follow provide strategies that will help VBPT to meet the transportation needs identified in the previous chapter. In order to ensure future success, actions taken to address needs should consider four guiding principles:

1. **Develop Community Benefit** – VBPT Efforts should provide the county with benefit in an overall, not just a transit focused manner. By enhancing the ability of people to make a number of choices for transportation and by providing alternative transportation for those who have no choice, the County's viability, diversity and livability is improved.
2. **Connectivity** – VBPT efforts should create ease of service between people, places and modes, by assuring that reasonable ways to connect between different providers (of transit service). Different modes should be not only available, but easy to understand and easy to use.
3. **Geographic Reach** – VBPT actions should assure that the geographic locations and concerns of stakeholders are thoughtfully integrated into planning and delivery of transit services to the greatest degree possible.
4. **Customer Satisfaction** – VBPT actions should make the customer the focal point of its processes, and assure that the ease of use, flexibility of service, and satisfaction of the customer is top priority.

Strategies

The following six strategies were developed to address service gaps and to achieve better efficiencies in service delivery:

1. Increasing coordination
2. Implementing technology
3. Utilizing technology to increase coordination
4. Improving public education
5. Instituting flex routes to serve certain geographic areas or targeted populations
6. Achieving funding stability for public transit

1. Increasing Coordination Strategies

One of the best ways to address gaps in services and to achieve efficiencies is through better coordination. What is coordination? Coordination is a technique for better resource management, in which improved organization strategies are applied to achieve greater cost-effectiveness in service delivery. The United States Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) have been working together for more than 10 years to foster increased coordination among the transportation services sponsored by each agency. Coordination experiences encompass a vast array of strategies, including complementary service planning, joint equipment and

vehicle procurements, maintenance and facilities sharing arrangements, coordinated service delivery, and consolidated services operation.

According to a conservative estimate from a study conducted by the National Academy of Science's Transportation Research Board, \$700 million could be saved nationally from coordination efforts.²³

Coordination has many benefits including the following:

- Increases transportation availability and access to jobs
- Enhances service quality
- Eliminates duplicative efforts
- Substantially improves the cost of transportation

In 2003, the FTA sponsored the Transportation Research Board to identify agencies using innovative and successful coordination strategies and practices in rural, suburban, and urban regions. A survey was produced and conducted. Based on the data collected and several case studies, innovative and successful coordination strategies and practices that have wide applicability were identified. Following is synopsis of some successful coordination strategies.

The public transit system contracts to provide trips to Medicaid or other human service agency clients. In many communities, Medicaid agencies have not made full use of fixed route transit services, opting for more costly paratransit services instead. As shown in numerous cases, moving only a small proportion of Medicaid clients to fixed route transit service saves the Medicaid agency very large sums of money, substantially increases revenues of the public transit agency at no additional operating cost, and provides mobility benefits for Medicaid clients.

Human service providers provide ADA paratransit services under contracts to public transit. In a number of communities, human service agencies have been providing paratransit services for a longer period of time than some transit agencies. Typically operating as private nonprofit organizations, the human service agencies often have cost structures that are less expensive than those of the transit agencies and can thus create significant savings for the transit agencies in providing the ADA-mandated services. (Using volunteers for drivers or other staff positions is one important way that human service agencies can generate large cost reductions.) For transit operators, contracting with human service transportation providers can be considered to be a key cost reduction strategy.

Transit systems and/or human service providers offer incentives to paratransit riders to use fixed/flex route transit services. Paratransit trips are often substantially more expensive than fixed/flex route trips. By offering incentives, including travel training, to frequent paratransit users, some of those paratransit riders will switch their

²³ TCRP Report 91, "Economic Benefits of Coordinating Human Services Transportation and Transit Services," 2003 http://gulliver.trb.org/publications/tcrp/tcrp91/tcrp91_covers-fm.pdf

regular travel mode to the fixed route service. This strategy has real shown cost reduction benefits for the paratransit program, the fixed/flex route operator, and human service agencies who sponsor trips for particular clients, and the riders themselves.

Human service agencies coordinate or consolidate their separate transportation services and functions to create a general public transportation system. Sometimes referred to as the “classic” coordination example; human service agencies band together to form a “critical mass” of service that can qualify for general public funding and offer real travel options throughout the entire community. This is a key productivity enhancement strategy that can be referred to as a synthesis or synergy strategy. This type of coordination is often combined with cost reduction, service enhancement, and mobility enhancement strategies.

Transportation providers institute a community-wide coordinated dispatching operation so that all vehicles in use can accommodate all types of passengers at all times. Often entitled “ridesharing,” this technique ensures the most cost effective application of driver and vehicle resources. Judiciously applied, it can eliminate the typical pre-coordination situation of overlapping and inefficient routes and schedules. In particular, the benefits of providing trips for ADA paratransit clients at the same time and on the same vehicle, as other travelers create much lower per trip costs, thus generating real savings for public transit operators. This is a key productivity enhancement strategy.

Travel services are expanded to more residents of the community through a variety of low-cost strategies. Some of the greatest dollar savings evidenced in the case studies of coordinated systems are those generated by the effective use of volunteers. Volunteers are most cost effectively used when specific trips have special requirements, such as the need for hands-on or escorted services; when providing the trip would ordinarily tie up a vehicle and a driver for a relatively long time; or in other circumstances where ridesharing would be difficult to implement. This is a key service expansion strategy that strongly relates to some cost reduction strategies.

Building Permanent Coordinated Relationships - Fluidity of coordination relationships was recognized as a major factor in the longevity of coordination arrangements.

The following steps were identified to increase the permanence of these relationships.

- Make coordinated services less dependent upon the persons involved and more dependent upon long-standing written agreements between agencies.

In the VBC agency survey, the following agencies were listed as potential partners in a coordinated system:

Van Buren Public Transit
 Van Buren Community Mental Health
 Department of Human Services
 Health Department
 Van Buren ISD
 Local School Districts
 Areas Agency on Aging
 Senior Centers (Covert & South Haven)
 Care-A-Van
 Van Buren Emergency Medical Services
 Hospitals/Medical Facilities
 MSU Extension
 Community Action Agency
 Taxi companies
 We-Care INC
 Coloma Transportation Service Center

- Key individuals in the coordination process should strive to make their agreements relatively permanent by committing these agreements to paper with the signatures of the heads of the respective agencies involved. These papers should include action plans that specify lists of activities to be undertaken over time, with milestones for joint meetings and jointly developed products.
- Developing realistic expectations about coordination's expected outcomes is another key tool in implementing successful coordinated transportation.

Many public transit agencies are moving towards coordination. The pooling of resources associated with coordination is attractive in the current climate of increasing costs and decreasing funding. VBPT has the opportunity to be the lead agency in bringing stakeholders together to begin coordinating transportation services in the county.

2. Implementing Technology Strategies

With or without increased coordination of services, technology is being relied on by several public transit agencies to provide more effective and efficient service to its customers. Over the past ten years there has been steady growth in the use of custom communications and information technology systems in public transit operations. These systems have been used primarily to automate manual processes, increase the amount and quality of operations data collected, increase system efficiencies, and enhance operating productivity. Technology can result in data that will be useful to link and measure customer needs with the services provided and to better understand trends to support the consideration of new strategies. While technologies have been demonstrated successfully in many larger transit environments, rural and small public transit operations have not yet taken full advantage of transit technology systems.

Some technology applications that are low cost connect readily to many different products and are easy to use are emerging in the consumer and business electronics markets. Many of these technology systems are being adapted in rural transit systems and include the following:

- Mobile Data Devices – Palm computers, PDAs (personal data assistants).
- Public Data Networks - Cellular communications network.
- Internet- Seamless connections between transit offices and agencies.
- Application Service Providers (ASP) - Firms that rent the use of technology, usually software applications, installed and maintained on the equipment of the ASP.

Identifying and implementing improved technology in VBPT operations will not be a one-time event. It has to involve a process and a plan to carry out that process. As indicated in the goals and objectives of the VBPT study, a broad based team has been formed to help in the technology selection and acquisition process. The team is comprised of people with a variety of skills and transit system perspectives including:

- VBPT management and operations staff.

- Professionals from related information departments.
- Leaders from human service agencies that currently or in the future may purchase service from VBPT.
- Board members, local government managers whose support is critical to procuring new technology.

Several goals and objectives highlighted in the study could be effectively addressed through automation. They included:

- More accurate and detailed reports.
- Increased coordination between human service agencies and VBPT.
- More accessible, more useful customer information.
- Improved scheduling productivity.

When assessing if automation will greatly improve these needs, several questions need to be answered. The technology team needs to thoroughly understand what existing business practices can be streamlined, and what policies need to be modified to streamline those practices.

The Transit Cooperative Research Program Report 76 suggests that technology review teams keep the following factors in mind as they evaluate technology options:

1. System

- System goals and objectives
- Funding availability

2. Staff

- Willingness to change current procedures
- Select a “Champion” to lead effort
- Experience and skills using computers and other technologies

3. Services

- Current and planned service levels
- Types of passengers
- Size of service area

4. Technology and Communications

- Current use of computer hardware and software
- Quality of coverage, type (analog or digital) and availability of radio, and other wireless communication services
- Quality, type and availability of communication services to connect to the Internet and public data networks
- Quality and availability of local technical support for computer and communication systems

Once the above factors are clearly understood and agreed upon by the technology review team, the Technology Guide found in the Implementation Handbook Toolkit will help with the initial process of matching needs with appropriate technologies:

3. Utilizing Technology to Increase Coordination Strategies

Coordination will require investments in technology. In some cases, transit technology is being designed to promote coordination. The Client Referral, Ridership, and Financial Tracking system (CRRAFT) is a web-based software program that has been developed to do just that. Originally developed for rural transit systems in New Mexico, it is now being utilized in other transit systems throughout the county. The system can be customized to meet the unique needs of each transit system.

For the transit operators, CRRAFT standardizes invoicing, ridership and financial reporting, and simplifies scheduling. It also allows for many users to access the system by the use of a password. With this capability, partner agencies can gain access to relevant information and reports as needed. For human service agencies, CRRAFT standardizes client transportation referral, improves accountability of transportation use and costs, and may reduce misuse of transportation assistance. Because CRRAFT is web-based, and therefore available to be used at any time, from any place, by authorized users, funding agencies can view reports in real-time and track their transportation funds as they are being utilized. With funding from the FTA/Federal Highways Administration Joint Program Office, the ATR Institute is enhancing CRRAFT to generate financial and client tracking reports for each agency that sponsors clients. CRRAFT also can generate FTA Sections 5311, 5310, and 3037 reports.

In New Mexico, the following human service agencies are referring clients for transportation through CRRAFT: selected developmental disability service providers; the Welfare-To-Work Program of the New Mexico Department of Labor; and the Temporary Assistance For Needy Families and Food Stamps Programs of the New Mexico Human Services Department. The cooperating rural transit operators also receive funding from the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Sections 5311, 5310, and/or 3037 Programs.

Technology is becoming prevalent in all businesses and public transit is no exception. Recently more and more rural transit systems are relying on improved technologies to improve efficiency and reporting. VBPT should consider increasing its use of technology to meet the demands of increased coordination, better reporting and increased efficiency.

4. Improving Public Education Strategies

Many public transit agencies have been able to increase ridership by providing a more user-friendly system that meets rider's needs and also by providing better rider education to new users. Some of the most prevalent requests from public transportation users pertain to service expansion. By adding service hours and tailoring routes to meet riders' needs, transit agencies are seeing repeat customers. The information contained in this report can help VBPT begin to decide which populations and types of trips to focus on

and target. VBPT will also need to continue communications with human service agencies to understand and begin meeting their client's transportation needs. Increasingly, public transit agencies are reaching out to prospective riders through education. Creating system awareness is crucial to attracting riders. VBPT is providing critical services to VBC, but it may not be fully understood by the community at large. Through advocacy and public relations the citizens of VBC can gain a better understanding of:

- The populations that depend on VBPT;
- VBPT's services and strengths;
- Actual costs of service;
- How transportation services affects the lives of citizens in need of accessing medical services, education, shopping, social services and much more;
- How VBPT helps people live more independently; and
- What it would mean to the customers of VBPT and the county as a whole if VBPT would cease transit operations.

Some transit operators have developed television or radio commercials and installed new bus stop signs to boost their presence in the community. Riding public transit may be daunting for new riders. Rider education programs can help. One public transit agency developed a how-to video explaining various aspects of the system. The video could show how to use public transit and provide information for riders with disabilities. The video could be available in Spanish to serve that growing population in the region. Distribution sites for a video could include schools, social and civic organizations and employer worksites around the community.

Many transit agencies utilize an advocacy group, such as a Friends of Transit group, to implement additional rider education programs. One successful program has been for transit agencies to provide a volunteer to assist new riders. The volunteers can be part of the Friends group. For more information on forming a Friends of Transit advocacy group, see the Toolkit in the Implementation Handbook.

5. Instituting Flex-Routes

Many rural systems cannot support a fixed route service because of low density in rural areas. However, many rural systems are finding that flex-routes are a feasible option and can increase ridership and efficiency. A flex-route is a hybrid of a fixed route and a paratransit service. It usually begins with adding time for Dial-A-Ride and general public passengers on its subscription service vehicles. Characteristics of a flex-route are:

- Bus stops, which are open to the public, are overlaid on an existing subscription service.
- Funded clients are assigned to routes based on where they live, not on routes exclusive to the agency that funds their trip.
- Drivers serve the general public as published stops according to a bus schedule, as they pick up and drop off funded clients at their doorstep.

VBPT offers an informal flex-route by adding general public riders to the contracted mental health buses when it can be accommodated. The flex-route system described in this study would set permanent bus stops that would be publicized to the general public. For example, the route from Decatur/Paw Paw area to Bangor for MTI would also continue to South Haven and offer bus stops along the way. So if someone had to get to Bangor or South Haven from the Decatur/Paw Paw area they would know to be at a scheduled bus stop at a certain time.

Many benefits can be achieved by offering flex-routes. Often flex-routes can reduce duplicative routing, decrease miles traveled, fill empty seats and create new revenue. These benefits could greatly help VBPT's service. An intangible benefit to VBPT would be more publicity and use by other riders generated by the publicity of the new bus stops and schedules. VBPT may seem more accessible to the general public with the introduction of publicized flex-routes. The published schedule provides predictability and the ability of riders to schedule appointments to meet the schedule. Further, there is integration of the disabled population with other passengers. This furthers the ADA's goal of inclusion. One interesting benefit that may result with flex-routes is that cost savings may be realized for human service agencies. As general ridership grows, fares may offset expenses allowing the transit provider to reduce trip costs for agencies that are billed on a per client basis.

To implement a flex-route, a public transit agency should determine a threshold of riders to support the route, determine a stable source of funding, negotiate with the funding agency and enlist community support. An advocacy or friends group can provide assistance with building community support for a flex-route.

The next step is to plan the flex-routes. Current origins and destinations and key public destinations should be mapped. (The process of mapping has begun with this report.) The routes must then be mapped (be sure to continue to meet the contracted agency clients' needs). Develop the stops and schedule. The bus stops should be located in convenient and accessible places. Utilize the Friends advocacy group to help secure the bus stops. Then set the fare for the service. Often fares for the general public riding the flex-route are lower than what the contract agency is paying. The contract agency must realize that the customers are receiving different levels of service (the contract rider is picked up and dropped off at their door while the general public rider is using a bus stop). Also the contract rider service includes charges for scheduling, billing and data entry. Some transit agencies offer introductory fares to establish ridership. A policy should be set on seats available for non-contracted riders. Schedule adherence should be a top priority of the transit agency.

Elements of Success:

- Build upon a core of existing services.
- Design a flex route that responds to identified community needs.
- Earn community support.
- Involve community leaders.
- Demonstrate greater efficiency and effectiveness.
- Communicate to all stakeholders.
- Develop a problem-solving attitude.
- Appoint a project manager.

The transit agency should implement a marketing campaign to introduce the flex-routes. This campaign could include key presentations to interested groups and making personal contacts with targeted groups such as doctor's offices, churches, elected officials, and business functions.

The most common barriers to flex-route implementation are establishing differential fares, convincing agencies of the cost effectiveness of the service, and resolving contracting agencies desire for control.

Successful flex-routes will decrease costs and increase efficiency of public transit in rural areas. VBPT should consider the introduction of flex-routes to improve its community image and to increase efficiency and ridership.

The Implementation Handbook with the Toolkit, accompanying this study, expands on how VBPT can begin to implement coordination, technology, and public education efforts and flex routes.

6. Achieving Funding Stability

There are many creative funding options that are available to VBPT. This section describes many of these potential options. The options vary greatly from increasing coordination, utilizing alternative fuel vehicles, developing partnerships, to trading services.

Transit Funding Sources

The provision of demand-response rural transit is an expensive proposition. On a nationwide basis, the average per passenger cost for demand response service is \$13.16 compared with \$1.98 for a conventional line haul bus. It is clear that demand-response is a low cost-recovery form of transit service.²⁴ Nationally, the three measures of costliness, cost-efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and service-effectiveness have worsened steadily since 1989.²⁵

Federal funding for public transit has failed to keep pace with inflation. By necessity, many transit agencies have been forced to look beyond the federal government for funding. The sources of funding outside the federal government generally fall into the following categories: local dedicated taxation, fare box increases, leveraging limited funds through low interest financing, use of assets to generate additional revenue streams, partnerships with private sector and transit users. Of the categories listed, some have the potential to provide significant funding and some are on the other end of the budgetary spectrum.

Local Dedicated Taxation

The nationwide trend has shown a rapid increase in dedicated funding through local taxation. These sources include local taxes and other dedicated funds at the state, local,

²⁴ TCRP Report 31, "Funding Strategies for Public Transportation, Final Report," 1998, http://gulliver.trb.org/publications/tcrp/tcrp_rpt_31-1-a.pdf

²⁵ TCRP Report 31, http://gulliver.trb.org/publications/tcrp/tcrp_rpt_31-1-a.pdf

and agency-jurisdictional levels. As of 1998, dedicated funding was the largest funding component after the fare box.²⁶ Sales taxes apply to goods and services sold in a specific area. The sales tax is the most common transit system funding source in America for dedicated local revenue. The strength of retail sales in an area can have a significant impact on the effectiveness and stability of the revenue stream from the sales tax. Beyond the sales tax, other options include a tax on utility use.

One system that benefits from such a tax is the transit agency in Pullman, Washington. Pullman's utility tax is levied on the use of telephone, water and sewer, electric, gas, and garbage utilities. Utility rates themselves, a component outside the control of the transit agency, will determine the amount of revenue received. All other things being equal, if the rates do not rise at a level consistent with inflation, the revenue derived through the tax will become a smaller percentage of the overall transit budget over time. Additionally, because utility usage is generally consistent over time, utility tax revenue can tend to remain flat as a result.

Of the 83 counties in the State of Michigan, 23 had countywide levies dedicated to transit in 2001. The amount of the levy ranges from 0.0995 mills in Iosco County to 0.7500 mills in Bay County. This information is less than complete however. Forty-three systems benefit from municipal levies that are not listed as "countywide" levies. Many of those millages are considerably larger than the countywide levies.

Since the publication of the 2005 Study, VBPT has been successful in securing a county-wide tax to support public transit. It is now very important for VBPT to expand services to meet increased demand and to track and promote increases in services. With continued cuts from federal and state sources, the local millage will continue to be a necessity for the future of VBPT.

Fare Box Revenue

Nationally, total fare box revenues constitute an average of approximately one-third of total operating funds. The majority of transit agencies have continued to increase their average fares but only one-half of the increases have outpaced inflation. Adding to the futility of fare increases is the fact that even with increases in fuel costs, automobile out-of-pocket costs have increased significantly below the rate of inflation. This paradox sometimes engenders an image problem for transit as the more expensive or inefficient mode.²⁷

Other Federal Funds

There are many other federal funds than the traditional sources that can be utilized for public transit. For example, Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds can be and are typically spent on purchasing buses, vans or transit passenger facilities. CMAQ funds can also be used for operating support for transit service. Less common, but still acceptable uses include: providing fare-free transit on days with unusually heavy air pollution; supporting transit marketing campaigns; and supporting ridesharing and

²⁶ TCRP Report 31, http://gulliver.trb.org/publications/tcrp/tcrp_rpt_31-1-a.pdf

²⁷ TCRP Report 31, http://gulliver.trb.org/publications/tcrp/tcrp_rpt_31-1-a.pdf

guaranteed ride home programs. CMAQ funds can also support transit provided from attainment areas into non-attainment areas. In the Implementation Handbook, Toolkit accompanying this report, there is a listing of several federal funding sources and their application to public transit.

Sales of Services and Products

Several transit agencies utilize their current assets and expand services to generate additional income. A public transit agency should consult with an accountant on any tax consequences before selling any non-ride services. One of the most common sources of unrelated income is the sale of advertising space inside or outside the vehicles. Strict sign ordinances can restrict billboards or other signage to make it a less than practical option for advertisers. In this instance, buses can provide a desirable option for advertisers. Even where billboards are an option, buses can be the preferred choice as a rolling advertisement space. This decision must begin with the transit agency itself. Some communities have expressed a concern that advertisements on buses are unattractive. If the decision is made to advertise through buses, the agency must establish how they will implement their program. Be prepared with information on the number and types of passengers you transport, the areas where your vehicles usually travel, and the miles traveled per year.

A range of involvement for the transit agency is possible. Some agencies have implemented an advertisement program through a third party advertising vendor that receives commission on the advertising sales while others manage the program in-house. If the agency elects to pursue vendors, a request for proposals is the chosen route. Critical issues to be considered in the contractual relationship between agency and vendor include guaranteed minimum payment amounts, defining the percentage of the advertising revenues the vendor will receive, penalties for untimely replacement of outdated advertising, explicit statements about the responsibility for the maintenance of the advertising infrastructure and installation of advertisements.²⁸

One successful strategy a transit agency used was to sell sponsorships to businesses that are frequented by public transit riders. Another example of selling services is from FREDericksburg Regional Transit (FRED), in Fredericksburg, Va. They sell copies of the local daily newspaper, the *Free Lance-Star*, on its vehicles. *Free Lance-Star* officials approached FRED about placing newspapers at the fixed-route stops. Instead, FRED accepted the newspapers for sale on the vehicles. The newspaper company installed a holder for the newspapers on each vehicle and a supply of papers is delivered to the FRED office each morning. Passengers simply drop 50¢ into a can on the holder when they take a paper. FRED receives a commission on the papers sold and in return the newspaper runs a free advertisement for FRED.

The ongoing CPR, First Aid, and passenger sensitivity training provided to public transit staff may be a source of revenue. Other agencies may need the same training for their staff. The transit agency can become a vendor, providing classes for a fee. Transit agencies have started by selling an extra seat or two in a class that is already being held.

²⁸ TCRP Report 31, http://gulliver.trb.org/publications/tcrp/tcrp_rpt_31-1-a.pdf

Since the transit agency is already paying for the instructor and supplies, any revenue from selling the extra space is pure profit. To find agencies to purchase these services, start with current public transit users.

These are just a few examples from other systems, VBPT must evaluate its strengths and opportunities to decide which types of services and products would be the most profitable. The key is to be open to recognize opportunities and also to be proactive in pursuing opportunities for providing or trading services with both public and private entities.

Leveraging Funds

Transit agencies are increasingly searching out opportunities to leverage federal funding by generating match funds from outside sources. The value from existing assets often allows access to funds through revolving loan programs and advanced construction authority. This type of funding is most often used to generate capital funds rather than operating funds. Historically, larger transit organizations have been the most common candidates for debt financing.²⁹ Like all debt financing, agencies must balance the need for capital funds with the danger of becoming over-leveraged.

Another non-traditional source of funding could be through a State Infrastructure Bank (SIB). The State of Michigan operates a State Infrastructure Bank through the MDOT Office of Transportation Economic Development and Enhancement. The State Infrastructure Bank loan program has a limited amount of money for low-interest loans for transportation improvements, credit enhancements (e.g. loan guarantees or letters of credit), interest rate subsidies, leases, and debt financing securities.

Increasing Coordination

Many small transit agencies have succeeded by developing technology systems that increase coordination of transportation services and benefit related social service providers, highway maintenance and operations, and private businesses. By partnering and coordinating transportation services, the parties share the cost and the benefits of new technology. Partnerships can also broaden the landscape for funding the purchase and implementation of new technologies.³⁰

Private Sector Partnerships

Partnerships with the private sector can take many forms. One of the most common is for the transit agency to contract directly with a particular client or organization to provide services. Similarly, whether through direct funding for specific services or partnerships with local businesses, transit agencies can go directly to user groups to find out what kind of service they want and negotiate for the funding assistance to provide it.

²⁹ TCRP Report 31, http://gulliver.trb.org/publications/tcrp/tcrp_rpt_31-1-a.pdf

³⁰ Advanced Public Transportation Systems for Rural Areas: Where Do We Start? How Far Should We Go? Transit Cooperative Research Program, Transportation Research Board-National Research Council (National Academy Press, Washington, D.C., 2001) 19.

VBPT could also explore expanding the token program. Currently the South Haven Senior Center purchases tokens from VBPT to provide to their clients. For example, VBPT could market the tokens to retailers. The retailers could purchase tokens from VBPT and then provide their customers with tokens for a free ride home with a minimum purchase from their store.

Partnerships with the private sector can also take the form of arrangements with suppliers (contracts with fuel suppliers-the proposed biodiesel plant in Bangor would appear to be a possible partnership opportunity), investors (cross-border leases), or retailers (credit card fare payment using ticket issuing machines), or groups of users or entire communities (including impact fees, local sales or utility taxes, direct operating support, and the use of multi-ride passes).

Alternative Fuel Vehicles

A technological innovation that can reduce costs in the long run is alternative fuel. Alternative fuels and public transit is a natural match. Economies of scale begin to yield measurable results because of the size of transit fleets. A system-wide change can create significant cost and efficiency savings if the conditions are right for a particular transit agency. In addition, opportunities for centralized fueling and technicians on staff who can be trained consistently also make for strong logic in favor of considering alternatives. Arguments can also be made for a diversity of vehicle fuel types. Through diversity, agencies can better withstand fluctuations in fuel supply and price.³¹ The primary fuel alternatives are also readily available through all major transit motor coach suppliers.

The initial cost of alternative fuel buses tends to be 20 to 40 percent more expensive than diesel buses. However, the increased capital costs are often offset by the savings derived from lower fuel costs, lower service costs, grants, credits, and rebates from groups who offer incentives.³² Funding can come from a variety of public sources. Because VBC is a maintenance area for the Environmental Protection Agency's 8-hour Ozone conformity standard, the County is now eligible for CMAQ funding through the U.S. Department of Transportation. Projects that reduce congestion and projects that improve air quality are supported through this funding. Public transit projects are often high priorities for CMAQ funding. Another funding source that supports alternative fuel applications is the U.S. Department of Energy's State Energy Program.

A critical partner who commonly enables a transit agency to successfully transition to alternative fuels is a local utility or fuel provider. The transit agency represents a potential catalyst in the community to enlarge the market for alternative fuels. Agencies are often able to install fueling stations that can be accessed by government departments and the public alike.

³¹ Alternative Fuels in Public Transportation: A Match Made on the Road, Community Transportation, Spring/Summer 2005: Vol. 23 Number 3, p. 15

³² Alternative Fuels (2005)

Fuel Types

Alternative fuels that have been utilized by other public transportation systems include, compressed natural gas, liquefied natural gas, liquefied petroleum gas, biodiesel, fuel ethanol blends, battery-electric power, and to a very limited extent - hydrogen. Nationwide, compressed natural gas (CNG) is the most common alternative fuel for buses. Estimates showed in 2000 that six percent of all buses ran on compressed natural gas. Since then more than 20 percent of all buses ordered have been CNG fueled.

Liquefied natural gas (LNG) is less common as an alternative fuel than CNG. On the one hand it tends to offer driving ranges that approach a typical diesel bus. But on the other hand, there are highly specialized needs for storage and delivery because the fuel must be cooled to -250°F. Proximity to a natural gas main line can make CNG or LNG either an unlikely option or a much more realistic one. The transportation of the fuel can raise the cost considerably.³³

Liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) or propane is the most widely used alternative fuel for light duty applications. Transit uses are typically in medium and small buses. Only 40 propane buses were active in 2001.³⁴

Biodiesel is a diesel fuel that is the product of processing the oil from renewable, biological sources like soybeans. The fuel tends to burn cleaner in most categories than standard diesel fuels. Various mixes of biodiesel fuel are typically marketed, beginning with a two percent mix, graduating to a 20 percent mix (B20), and finally to a 100 percent pure (B100) form. Only the B100 form requires major engine modifications. B20 requires only minor engine modifications from standard diesel fuel.³⁵ The minor changes required for existing fleets makes this an attractive alternative for some agencies. VBC appears close to adding a biodiesel processing plant in Bangor. Biodiesel prices tend to vary considerably by region so the proximity to a major processor could make this a particularly attractive alternative for Van Buren Transit.

Fuel ethanol blends are similar to biodiesel in that the ethanol additive is derived from renewable, agricultural crops. The blends range from 10 percent ethanol to a blend that is 85 percent ethanol.

Battery electric power allows for buses that are quiet and produce no tailpipe emissions. They do have drawbacks that include limited range because of the limited storage capacity of battery technology, and agencies must add charging infrastructure. In 2002, 32 battery powered buses were in use nationwide.³⁶

Hydrogen has become one of the most talked-about alternative fuels recently. It is the enormous potential of the fuel that has produced the excitement. However, it is still rather early in the development of this fuel and very few test buses have reached the road.

³³ Alternative Fuels (2005)

³⁴ Alternative Fuels (2005)

³⁵ Alternative Fuels (2005)

³⁶ Alternative Fuels (2005)

Ultimately, the consideration of alternative fuel buses has to include the cost of the vehicles, the fueling infrastructure, and the maintenance facilities. Some issues of proximity and the potential partners make some choices more viable than others. The right partners can make a tremendous difference. Likely partners may include a bus manufacturer, fuel provider, local fire department, and training facilities. Finally, to be successful with alternative fuel buses, training is vital for operators and mechanics.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

As a means to implement the strategies outlined in the previous chapter, a steering committee developed goals, objectives, and actions steps, which resulted in a detailed action plan to guide the future of VBPT. This bulk of this chapter is comprised of an excerpt from the action plan, which includes only the goals, objectives, and action steps that are relevant to coordination have been included. The complete action plan, or matrix, along with goals and objectives, is available in the Implementation Handbook that accompanies the VBPT Study.

Because VBC is rural, there is no competitive, local process to apply for state and federal funding, and local transportation projects do not proceed through an application process with a metropolitan planning organization. Therefore, should VBPT decide to apply for federal or state funding, the agency should follow the steps required by the state and federal agencies.

Action Plan

In the abbreviated action plan below, each goal has multiple objectives, and each objective has action steps that can be tracked for progress. For each action step, relevant information that will guide direction and action is presented. This information includes the resources that may be needed to proceed, a potential lead agency and/or person, a list of potential partnering agencies, the priority of the action (immediate, medium or long-term), an indicator of success and comments on any progress. The indicator of success points out ideas on how to measure or decide if the action and objectives are being met. If the actions and objectives are being accomplished, then the overall goals and mission statement of VBPT are being achieved.

Each action step has been assigned a priority level to indicate the estimated time necessary to complete: Immediate = within 1 year; Medium = within 2-4 years; Long term = within 5-10 years. Action steps have been color-coded for ease of priority level interpretation. Actions of immediate priority are coded orange, actions of immediate-medium priority are pink, actions of medium priority are yellow, and actions of medium-long term priority are green.

Goal: Develop a coordinated, centralized, countywide transportation system with regional connections.

Objective: *Expand LAC to become an interagency/user/private provider transportation focused group to build partnerships and communication.*

Action: Solicit key agencies to appoint a transportation representative to attend LAC meetings.

Resources Needed	List of Key human service agencies, Invitation (See Toolkit A)
Lead Agency/Person	Steering Committee, VBPT Board, LAC
Key Partner(s)	See Toolkit A
Indicator of Success	Number of members on LAC, diversity of representation on LAC
Action Priority	Immediate
Comments/Progress	This was discussed at length at the Aug 2005 steering committee meeting and received support for moving ahead.

Action: Have VBPT and agencies sign partnership agreement to explore a coordinated system.

Resources Needed	See sample agreements in Toolkit A
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Board, LAC
Key Partner(s)	See Toolkit A
Indicator of Success	Number of partnership agreements signed
Action Priority	Immediate
Comments/Progress	Support for this was evident at the Aug 2005 steering committee meeting

Objective: *Assess all resources (including funding, people, and fleet) and gaps in transportation services being provided by all agencies and private providers.*

Action: Develop and complete a detailed information sheet on each provider.

Resources Needed	Financial Statements, Survey results (see Appendix of study for full results)
Lead Agency/Person	LAC, VBPT Board
Key Partner(s)	All providers
Indicator of Success	Number of completed information sheets
Action Priority	Immediate
Comments/Progress	Agency survey complete

Action: For employment trips, investigate using vanpool coordinated through VBPT.

Resources Needed	List of people needing rides to employment locations
Lead Agency/Person	SWMPC, Rideshare

Key Partner(s)	VBPT dispatch, Michigan Works, large employers, employees
Indicator of Success	Number of people using van pools in Van Buren County
Action Priority	Immediate-Medium
Comments/Progress	
Action: Identify gaps and explore contracting with private providers to meet gaps in service demand.	
Resources Needed	Identify providers who would be most suited to fulfill gaps.
Lead Agency/Person	LAC, VBPT Board, Director
Key Partner(s)	Private providers
Indicator of Success	Number of contracts/agreements with private providers, decrease gaps in service
Action Priority	Medium
Comments/Progress	
Objective: Explore and implement an inter-agency-provided centralized dispatch.	
Action: Define needs, select appropriate technology, and determine implementation steps.	
Resources Needed	Information on technology options for rural demand response systems (See Toolkit B)
Lead Agency/Person	Technology review team
Key Partner(s)	LAC, VBPT Board, Director, Operations
Indicator of Success	Cost effective technology that improves efficiency and the capability of trip scheduling, dispatch
Action Priority	Medium
Comments/Progress	
Action: Identify funding sources for technology.	
Resources Needed	See resources in Toolkit I
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT, Agencies currently providing/coordinating transportation
Key Partner(s)	Mental Health, Human Services, Area Agency on Aging,
Indicator of Success	Adequate funding to purchase and maintain technology and equipment.
Action Priority	Medium
Comments/Progress	Consider pooling resources from different agencies.
Action: Select agency that would function as a mobility manager/dispatch/info center.	
Resources Needed	Assessment of agency resources, staff, etc.
Lead Agency/Person	LAC, technology team, VBPT Board, Director, Operations
Key Partner(s)	Agencies
Indicator of Success	An agency committed to be the coordinated mobility manager.

Action Priority	Medium
Comments/Progress	This step and prior steps requires agencies to not get bogged down in “turf” battles.
Objective: Increase efforts for a regional, inter-connected system.	
Action: Host quarterly meetings with Berrien, Kalamazoo, Allegan, and Cass Public Transit Systems.	
Resources Needed	Letter to solicit meeting, meeting location, meeting agenda
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Board, LAC
Key Partner(s)	Agencies, surrounding county public transit agencies (See Toolkit A)
Indicator of Success	4 meetings/year with good attendance/representation from 5 counties
Action Priority	Immediate
Comments/Progress	Rotate meeting location between each county.
Action: Utilize all agencies’ customer/client databases to track and build groups needing transportation between counties.	
Resources Needed	Interagency database
Lead Agency/Person	LAC, VBPT Dispatch, Agency transportation coordinators
Key Partner(s)	
Indicator of Success	Created and maintained database
Action Priority	Immediate-Medium
Comments/Progress	Current JARC funds – 70% going from Hartford to Benton Harbor also need to go to Kalamazoo.
Action: Dialogue with other counties to determine established and publicized county transfer points to meet users’ needs.	
Resources Needed	Meeting between transit agencies
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director, LAC
Key Partner(s)	Berrien, Cass, Kalamazoo and Allegan Public Transit Systems, Key Agencies
Indicator of Success	Number of transfer points established and publicized
Action Priority	Medium
Comments/Progress	

Goal: Increase stakeholder satisfaction.

Objective: Provide easily accessible information to riders/agencies.	
Action: Evaluate the need to translate all VBPT publications (brochure, website, etc.) to Spanish.	
Resources Needed	Telamon - grants for serving Hispanic populations?
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director
Key Partner(s)	Telamon, MSUE Community Development Agent

Indicator of Success	Number of publications translated
Action Priority	Medium – long term
Comments/Progress	
Action: Maintain a dispatcher that can speak Spanish or work with an agency to provide translation assistance.	
Resources Needed	Spanish training
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director
Key Partner(s)	Tel-A-Mon
Indicator of Success	Average number of hours/week with Spanish speaking dispatcher
Action Priority	Medium – Long Term
Comments/Progress	
Objective: Identify, understand, and respond to users/agencies transit needs.	
Action: Continuously review reports to track gaps and opportunities to meet demand.	
Resources Needed	Reports tracking gaps/opportunities
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Dispatch
Key Partner(s)	Agencies, LAC
Indicator of Success	Reduced number of gaps
Action Priority	Immediate – Medium
Comments/Progress	
Action: Conduct stakeholder satisfaction surveys.	
Resources Needed	See Toolkit C
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director
Key Partner(s)	LAC, Agencies, VBPT Board
Indicator of Success	Number of surveys completed, level of satisfaction
Action Priority	Medium
Comments/Progress	
Action: Create and utilize customer information form for passengers with special circumstances to track and meet needs.	
Resources Needed	See example in Toolkit C
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Dispatch
Key Partner(s)	Agency case workers
Indicator of Success	Number of completed information forms
Action Priority	Medium

Comments/Progress	
Action: Conduct rider demand study.	
Resources Needed	Maps and transit, agency & employer data – much of this information is in 2005 study – will need to be updated as clients change
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director, LAC
Key Partner(s)	Agencies (case workers), SWMPC or VB County GIS Department
Indicator of Success	A completed rider demand study
Action Priority	Medium
Comments/Progress	See maps in 2005 study
Action: Evaluate the need to redistribute service hours and days to accommodate maximum number of customers.	
Resources Needed	Needs of clients and agencies (case workers), results from daily forms and rider demand study
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Board, Director, Operations, Dispatch, Key agencies, LAC
Key Partner(s)	
Indicator of Success	Number of riders in expanded hours
Action Priority	Medium
Comments/Progress	

GOAL: Increase operational efficiency and productivity.

Objective: Streamline processes.	
Action: Identify needs/weaknesses in current operations (dispatch, billing, reporting, performance indicators).	
Resources Needed	Reports, data
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Operations, VBPT Director
Key Partner(s)	LAC, technology team, VBPT Board
Indicator of Success	List of needs/weaknesses
Action Priority	Immediate
Comments/Progress	
Action: Consider current and future needs and select appropriate computer/software technologies for billing, customer tracking, etc. (Conduct cost/benefit analysis)	
Resources Needed	Interviews with key collectors of information/data
Lead Agency/Person	Technology team, VBPT Operations
Key Partner(s)	LAC, VBPT Board

Indicator of Success	Selected technology with benefits and costs.
Action Priority	Medium
Comments/Progress	See Toolkit B
Action: Determine steps and time line for implementing technologies.	
Resources Needed	Information from technology provider
Lead Agency/Person	Technology team, VBPT Director, LAC
Key Partner(s)	VBPT Board
Indicator of Success	Established timeline
Action Priority	Medium
Comments/Progress	
Objective: Develop flex routes. (See study for definition of flex route.)	
Action: Determine common destinations and origins to plan flex routes.	
Resources Needed	Maps in 2005 study, updated client lists and destinations from Key Agencies, (see Toolkit F)
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Operations
Key Partner(s)	Drivers, dispatcher, agencies, SWMPC or VB County GIS Department
Indicator of Success	Number of destinations and origins on map
Action Priority	Immediate
Comments/Progress	Maintain updated clients (origins) and destinations
Action: Identify ¼ mile buffers around contracted routes for scheduling more riders along route & for establishing publicized bus stops.	
Resources Needed	Contracted routes being run by VBPT, days, times to create maps
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Operations
Key Partner(s)	SWMPC (mapping), contracted agencies
Indicator of Success	Number of ¼ mile buffers established around contracted routes, number of publicized bus routes
Action Priority	Immediate – Medium
Comments/Progress	
Action: Develop customized spreadsheets and databases to track customer profiles with trip type, origin, destination, etc.	
Resources Needed	Example spreadsheets/databases
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Dispatcher, agency caseworkers
Key Partner(s)	
Indicator of Success	Created database/spreadsheet, Number of entries in database

Action Priority	Immediate – Medium
Comments/Progress	
Action: Determine and test drive flex routes.	
Resources Needed	Mapping and timing of routes
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Operations
Key Partner(s)	Drivers
Indicator of Success	Number of flex routes tested, Number of riders and additional revenue, Cost/Mile
Action Priority	Medium
Comments/Progress	
Action: Develop rider incentives to promote use of flex routes (reduced fares).	
Resources Needed	User survey to determine appropriate incentive
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director, drivers
Key Partner(s)	LAC
Indicator of Success	Number of riders, Total passengers/Total seats available (load factor), Fare box revenue/Cost (Fare box recovery ratio)
Action Priority	Medium
Comments/Progress	
Action: Identify and approach businesses/agencies to be sponsors for new flex routes that serve their business/agency.	
Resources Needed	List of businesses that could directly benefit, sponsorship amount and opportunities available
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director
Key Partner(s)	VBPT Board, LAC
Indicator of Success	Number of sponsorships/businesses, Amount of sponsorships/year
Action Priority	Medium
Comments/Progress	

Goal: Create awareness in the community of VBPT services, costs of services, funding sources and the need for public transit.

Objective: Develop, improve and implement public outreach methods/products.

Action: Improve VBPT website – utilize VB County website but appear to be separate.

Resources Needed	Examples of similar sized systems websites, updated information (See Toolkit G)
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director, VB GIS Department

Key Partner(s)	LAC, VBISD
Indicator of Success	Number of website hits/quarter
Action Priority	Immediate
Comments/Progress	Work with and give updated information to VB GIS Department for updating website
Action: Improve printed materials and distribution methods.	
Resources Needed	Examples of similar sized rural transit system brochures
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director
Key Partner(s)	VBPT Board, LAC, Friends Group
Indicator of Success	Number of brochures distributed/year
Action Priority	Immediate – Medium
Comments/Progress	
Action: Increase presence and provide information about services at community functions when possible. (i.e., Michigan Works, Job Fairs).	
Resources Needed	List of community functions, brochures, display
Lead Agency/Person	Friends Group
Key Partner(s)	VBPT Board, LAC, Key Agencies
Indicator of Success	Number of functions attended/year
Action Priority	Immediate – Medium
Comments/Progress	
Action: Solicit email addresses to begin a quarterly e-newsletter with ridership and other information.	
Resources Needed	e-mail addresses of users, key agencies, county commissioners, local officials, municipalities, etc.; quarterly information
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director
Key Partner(s)	Friends Group, LAC, VBPT Board
Indicator of Success	4 newsletters/year, number of e-mails on distribution list
Action Priority	Immediate – Medium
Comments/Progress	
Action: Develop and distribute VBPT articles/press releases for publication in newspapers and municipal newsletters.	
Resources Needed	List of media contacts, municipalities with newsletters or e-newsletters (See Toolkit G for list of municipal websites)
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director

Key Partner(s)	Friends Group, VBPT Board, municipalities, newspapers
Indicator of Success	Number of articles distributed, Number of articles printed in newspapers, Number of municipal newsletters or e-newsletters that run articles
Action Priority	Immediate – Medium
Comments/Progress	Since his hiring in January 2007, the VBPT director has released several articles to local media.
Action: Establish a spokesperson and protocol to inform staff and public of changes.	
Resources Needed	Example protocols
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Board, VBPT Director
Key Partner(s)	LAC, staff, Key Agencies
Indicator of Success	Established protocol and trained spokesperson
Action Priority	Immediate – Medium
Comments/Progress	
Action: Ensure VBPT services are present on all stakeholder websites.	
Resources Needed	List of stakeholders web addresses and contact person (See Toolkit G for list of municipalities with websites)
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director
Key Partner(s)	LAC, VBPT Board
Indicator of Success	Number of links on partner websites
Action Priority	Medium
Comments/Progress	
Action: Create a webpage for agency caseworkers to use to better serve their clients' transportation needs.	
Resources Needed	County website, information from all agencies providing transportation
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT
Key Partner(s)	Private and public transportation providers, Senior Services, ISD, Work First, Area Agency on Aging, Community Mental Health, Rideshare, Faith-based
Indicator of Success	Number of hits on webpage
Action Priority	Medium – Long-term
Comments/Progress	Provide tips on using VBPT to agencies and case - workers.
Action: Implement volunteer program to educate and assist new users/riders.	
Resources Needed	Volunteers, established program
Lead Agency/Person	Friends Group, VBPT Director
Key Partner(s)	SW MI Volunteer Center, VBPT Board, LAC, Key Agencies (caseworkers)

Indicator of Success	Number of volunteers, Number of assisted trips
Action Priority	Medium – Long-term
Comments/Progress	Utilize friends group to develop program and recruit volunteers.

Goal: Ensure fiscal stability.

Objective: Develop a strategic financial plan.

Action: Evaluate trends and needs of VBPT and rural transit systems in general.

Resources Needed	See 2005 study – needs assessment section
Lead Agency/Person	SWMPC
Key Partner(s)	Steering committee, MDOT
Indicator of Success	Summary of trends and needs
Action Priority	Immediate
Comments/Progress	VBPT Board/Director could have additional discussions with other rural transit agencies

Action: Develop a short-term budget (2 years).

Resources Needed	Revenues and expenses for 2 years
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Board, VBPT Director, County Commissioners
Key Partner(s)	MDOT, funding agencies, contract agencies, LAC
Indicator of Success	No shortfalls in budget for 2 years
Action Priority	Immediate
Comments/Progress	Explore gap financing if necessary -see 2005 study – funding options section

Action: Develop a long-term budget (5-10 years).

Resources Needed	Revenue and expense projections, potential funding sources, equipment needs
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Board, Director, County Commissioners
Key Partner(s)	MDOT, other funding sources, LAC, contract agencies
Indicator of Success	No shortfalls in long term budget
Action Priority	Immediate
Comments/Progress	

Objective: Identify and meet requirements to maintain state and federal funding.

Action: Maintain regular contact with MDOT departments to keep updated on RTAP, 5311, JARC, New Freedom, and 5310 funding and new funding sources.

Resources Needed	MDOT contact list
------------------	-------------------

Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director
Key Partner(s)	LAC
Indicator of Success	All federal and state funding sources are received
Action Priority	Immediate - On-going
Comments/Progress	
Action: Keep up-to-date on federal legislation that impacts VBPT and ensure compliance with federal and state regulations (ADA, etc).	
Resources Needed	United We Ride website, CTA (For information on SAFETEA-LU FY2006-2009 go to http://www.apta.com/government_affairs/safetea_lu/documents/brochure.pdf)
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director, VBPT Board
Key Partner(s)	LAC
Indicator of Success	Compliance with regulations, All federal and state funds available are received
Action Priority	Immediate – On-going
Comments/Progress	Continue to attend annual MDOT legislative meetings.
Objective: Institute an adequate and equitable fee structure for all services.	
Action: Assess current contract fee structures and adjust if necessary.	
Resources Needed	Current contract information
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director, VBPT Board
Key Partner(s)	
Indicator of Success	Contract revenue/cost (recovery ratio)
Action Priority	Immediate
Comments/Progress	
Action: Assess expenses and subsidies to determine appropriate fee structures for potential new contracts.	
Resources Needed	
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director
Key Partner(s)	VBPT Board
Indicator of Success	Contract revenue/costs (recovery ratio)
Action Priority	Immediate
Comments/Progress	
Action: Engage human service agency staff to determine equitable fee structure.	
Resources Needed	Potential fare structures

Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director
Key Partner(s)	LAC, users, Key Agencies
Indicator of Success	Average fare does not exceed 20% of household income for a low income family
Action Priority	Immediate – Medium
Comments/Progress	
Action: Determine cost to deliver each service (Dial-A-Ride, county wide, contract).	
Resources Needed	Understand subsidies from state and federal funders and cost to deliver services
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director
Key Partner(s)	
Indicator of Success	Costs for each type of service compared to fare charged x number of riders
Action Priority	Immediate –Medium
Comments/Progress	See 2005 study – Performance Indicators
Action: Analyze other providers fare structures to ensure fares are comparable.	
Resources Needed	Private providers current fares (See 2005 study for list of private providers)
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director
Key Partner(s)	LAC
Indicator of Success	VBPT fares compared to similar systems, Fare box recovery ratio (farebox revenue/cost)
Action Priority	Immediate –Medium
Comments/Progress	
Objective: Identify and secure private source funding whose customers are served by VBPT.	
Action: Identify, determine amounts and sell sponsorship opportunities.	
Resources Needed	List of sponsorship opportunities and price, list of potential sponsors
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director, VBPT Board
Key Partner(s)	LAC
Indicator of Success	Number of sponsorships/year, amount of sponsorships/year
Action Priority	Immediate
Comments/Progress	(Opportunities can include business name on printed materials, website banners, rider subsidies, seats, bus advertising, etc.)
Action: Expand the pre-paid token program.	
Resources Needed	List of businesses/agencies to approach about program, information about program to give to businesses/agencies
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director, LAC

Key Partner(s)	Key agencies (caseworkers), VBPT Board
Indicator of Success	Number of tokens sold/quarter, Revenue from tokens sold
Action Priority	Immediate
Comments/Progress	Ask businesses to purchase tokens for customers – in return offer advertising on buses, brochures, website, etc.
Objective: Increase special services contracts.	
Action: Explore special event shuttles, tours, and other tourism-related transportation opportunities/contracts.	
Resources Needed	Create list of events and contacts (See 2005 study for list of festivals in Tourism Related Travel)
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director, VBPT Board, LAC
Key Partner(s)	
Indicator of Success	Number of special services contracts/year
Action Priority	Immediate
Comments/Progress	Contact Chambers of Commerce, festival planners, wedding planners, etc.
Objective: Identify and maximize all federal and state funding sources.	
Action: Investigate using CMAQ (MDOT) funds for buses and technology to increase efficiency – utilize renewable energy, etc.	
Resources Needed	CMAQ information (See Toolkit I and 2005 study funding options)
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director
Key Partner(s)	VBPT Board, LAC
Indicator of Success	Amount of funds secured from CMAQ
Action Priority	Immediate
Comments/Progress	
Action: Investigate using 5310 (FTA) funds to better serve clients.	
Resources Needed	5310 information
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director
Key Partner(s)	VBPT Board, LAC, human service providers
Indicator of Success	Amount of funds secured from 5310
Action Priority	Immediate
Comments/Progress	
Action: Investigate using JARC (FTA) funds to better serve clients.	
Resources Needed	JARC information
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director

Key Partner(s)	VBPT Board, LAC, human service providers
Indicator of Success	Amount of funds secured from JARC
Action Priority	Immediate
Comments/Progress	
Action: Investigate using New Freedom funds to better serve clients.	
Resources Needed	New Freedom information
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director
Key Partner(s)	VBPT Board, LAC, human service providers
Indicator of Success	Amount of funds secured from New Freedom
Action Priority	Immediate
Comments/Progress	
Action: Secure meetings with potential new funding sources.	
Resources Needed	United We Ride
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director
Key Partner(s)	VBPT Board, LAC
Indicator of Success	Number of meetings secured, number of new potential funding sources
Action Priority	Immediate – Medium
Comments/Progress	Ideas for new funding sources – USDA Rural Development, Easter Seals, etc. (See Toolkit I)
Action: Explore pooling transportation funding sources from different agencies.	
Resources Needed	(see Goal #1 on coordination) (See Toolkit I)
Lead Agency/Person	LAC, VBPT Director
Key Partner(s)	VBPT Board
Indicator of Success	Number of funding sources secured, amount of funding secured
Action Priority	Immediate – Medium
Comments/Progress	
Action: Determine potential role in responding to large-scale emergencies and participating in emergency planning drills.	
Resources Needed	VB County Emergency Response plans, track time and money spent while participating in drills.
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director
Key Partner(s)	VB Emergency Management/Al Svilpe
Indicator of Success	Number of drills VBPT participates in
Action Priority	Medium

Comments/Progress	Usually any time devoted to planning drills will be reimbursed by the federal grants for implementing the drills.
Objective: Identify and implement cost saving initiatives.	
Action: Investigate using Powernet Global or other providers for the 1-800 number.	
Resources Needed	Phone records and costs
Lead Agency/Person	SWMPC
Key Partner(s)	VBPT
Indicator of Success	Phone charges less than other phone service provider fees
Action Priority	Immediate
Comments/Progress	Completed by SWMPC – current phone service is very affordable for level of service provided
Action: Investigate feasibility of VBPT being the coordinator/broker to schedule transportation for clients of the Welfare to Work (Project Zero Grant) Program.	
Resources Needed	JARC funding, study findings
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director, Operations, Dispatch, VBPT Board
Key Partner(s)	Michigan Works – Mike Tucker
Indicator of Success	Contract expense/VBPT expense to perform contracted duties
Action Priority	Immediate
Comments/Progress	
Action: Investigate strategic partnerships for supplies such as service, fuel, etc.	
Resources Needed	List of agencies that might be have similar needs in supplies and service
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director, VBPT Board
Key Partner(s)	LAC
Indicator of Success	Number of partnerships identified, Amount of savings
Action Priority	Medium
Comments/Progress	
Action: Determine most efficient size of buses needed to serve current and future users.	
Resources Needed	Base on rider demand surveys, TCRP manual has good guidance
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director, VBPT Operations
Key Partner(s)	VBPT Board, LAC
Indicator of Success	Total passengers/Total Seats (load factor)
Action Priority	Immediate – Medium
Comments/Progress	

Action: Control fuel costs and efficiency by utilizing renewable or green technology.	
Resources Needed	CMAQ funds
Lead Agency/Person	VBPT Director, VBPT Operations
Key Partner(s)	VBPT Board, MDOT, companies that sell green products
Indicator of Success	Amount of fuel savings, cost/vehicle mile
Action Priority	Immediate – Medium
Comments/Progress	(Check if buses can currently run on biodiesel)

Coding Scheme:

Immediate

Immediate-medium

Medium

Medium-long term

APPENDIX

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Following is a list of invited steering committee members; those with an asterisk attended at least one meeting.

*Marc Del Mariani, Van Buren Human Services
 *Paul VandenBosch, South Haven City
 *Jennifer Carver, South Haven Area Senior Services
 *Arles Odette, South Haven Area Senior Services
 *Greta Williams, VBC United Way
 *Lindsay Bay, VBC United Way
 *Yemi Akinwale, Hartford City
 *Carole Adam, Lakeview Community Hospital
 *Nancy Murton, Tri-County Head Start
 *Debra Hess (John Clement), VBC Mental Health Authority
 *Rick Bowser, VBC Mental Health Authority
 *John Faul, VBC Administrator
 Jeff Elliott, Van Buren/Cass Health Department
 *Larry Nielsen, Bangor City
 *Mike Tucker, Michigan Works!
 *Lynne Myers, Michigan Works!
 South Haven Community Hospital
 Brad Noeldner, Paw Paw Village
 *Daryl Mosely, Van Buren Public Transit
 *Laurie Schlipp, Van Buren Public Transit
 David Rigozzi, LAC, Citizen Representative
 *Dean Beckwith, VBPT Board
 *Harold Johnson, VBPT Board
 *Judy Lammers, Area Agency on Aging
 Leeon Arrans, VBC ISD
 Myrna Stevenson, Lewis Cass ISD
 Patty Holden, Michigan Works!
 *Richard Freestone, VBPT Board
 Sue McCauley, VBC Human Services
 Todd Brugh, VBPT
 *William Myrkle, VBPT Board
 *Tom Tanczos, VBC Commission
 *John Tapper, VBC Commission

Since the development of the VBPT Study, there have been several changes in county leadership:

- John Faul has been replaced by Doug Cultra as County Administrator;
- Brad Noeldner is no longer the Village Manager of Paw Paw;

- Tom Tanczos, John Tapper, and Harold Johnson have been replaced by Tom Erdmann, Mike Toth, and Sue Hammond as County Commissioners; and
- Lindsay Bay and Greta Willams are no longer with United Way.